



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 18, 2003

Mr. J. David Dodd, III
Nichols, Jackson, Dillard, Hager & Smith, L.L.P.
1800 Lincoln Plaza
500 North Akard
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2003-6574

Dear Mr. Dodd:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 187945.

The City of Allen (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for information related to a specified incident. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the submitted information includes a search warrant affidavit. The affidavit to support a search warrant is made public by statute if the search warrant has been executed. *See* Code Crim. Proc art. 18.01(b). Here, the search warrant has been executed. Additionally, we note that the submitted information includes an arrest warrant and supporting affidavit. The 78th Legislature recently amended article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to add language providing:

The arrest warrant, and any affidavit presented to the magistrate in support of the issuance of the warrant, *is public information*, and beginning immediately when the warrant is executed the magistrate's clerk *shall make a copy of the warrant and the affidavit available for public inspection* in the clerk's office during normal business hours. A person may request the clerk

to provide copies of the warrant and affidavit on payment of the cost of providing the copies.

Act of May 31, 2003, 78th Leg., R.S., ch. 390, § 1, Tex. Sess. Laws Serv. 1631 (to be codified as amendment to Code Crim. Proc. art. 15.26) (emphasis added). The submitted information includes an executed arrest warrant as well as an affidavit presented to a magistrate in support of that warrant. This provision makes these documents public. The exceptions found in the Public Information Act do not, as a general rule, apply to information that is made public by other statutes. *See* Open Records Decision No. 525 (1989) (statutory predecessor). Therefore, the city must release the search warrant affidavit, arrest warrant, and arrest warrant affidavit to the requestor.

Next, section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.”¹ Section 261.201 of the Family Code reads in part as follows:

(a) The following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

(1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and

(2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

We conclude that the remaining submitted information consists of files, reports, records, and working papers used or developed in an investigation made under chapter 261 of the Family Code. You have not indicated that the city has adopted a rule that governs the release of this type of information. Therefore, we assume that no such regulation exists. Given that assumption, the remaining submitted information is confidential pursuant to section 261.201 of the Family Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (construing predecessor statute). Accordingly, the city must not release this information.²

¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception like section 552.101 on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

²As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your arguments under sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code.

In summary, we conclude that: 1) the city must release the search warrant affidavit, arrest warrant, and arrest warrant affidavit; and 2) all remaining information must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



W. Montgomery Meitler
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

WMM/lmt

Ref: ID# 187945

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Gene McKinney
1341 W. Mockingbird, Suite 300 W.
Dallas, Texas 75247
(w/o enclosures)