ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 13, 2004

Mr. Lou Bright
General Counsel
Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission
P. O. Box 13127
Austin, Texas 78711-3127

OR2004-0263

Dear Mr. Bright:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 194229.

The Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (the "commission") received a request for documents related to the application for and granting of an alcoholic beverage license for certain periods of time, a specified address, and a specified business entity. You state that some responsive information was provided to the requestor. You claim, however, that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and have reviewed the submitted representative sample documents.[1]

You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 5.48 of the Alcoholic Beverage Code.[2] Section 5.48 provides:

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[1] We assume that the representative sample of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach and, therefore, does not authorize the withholding of any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

[2] Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision. *See* Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information that is protected from disclosure by other statutes.

> (a) "Private records," as used in this section, means all records of a permittee, licensee, or other person other than the name, proposed location, and type of permit or license sought in an application for an original or renewal permit or license, or in a periodic report relating to the importation, distribution, or sale of alcoholic beverages required by the commission to be regularly filed by a permittee or licensee.
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> (b) The private records of a permittee, licensee, or other person that are required or obtained by the commission or its agents, in connection with an investigation or otherwise, are privileged unless introduced in evidence in a hearing before the commission or before a court in this state or the United States.

Alco. Bev. Code § 5.48. We note that the term "privileged" in section 5.48 has been construed to mean "confidential" for purposes of the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. *See* Attorney General Opinion JM-1235 at 2 (1990); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 186 (1978), 62 (1974). Thus, section 5.48 makes confidential any records required or obtained by the commission, with the exception of "the name, proposed location, and type of permit or license sought in any application for a permit or license or any renewal thereof" and "any periodic report covering the importation, distribution, or sale of any alcoholic beverages required by the Board to be regularly filed by a permittee or licensee." Alco. Bev. Code § 5.48.

In this instance, you indicate that the requested information pertains to business entities' original applications and renewal applications for permits to serve alcoholic beverages. You also indicate that the requestor has been provided with each applicant's name and proposed location and the types of permits for which the applicant has applied. You also inform us that the information at issue has never been introduced into evidence in a hearing before the commission or before a court in this state or the United States. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted information, we agree that this information consists of "private records" that are privileged under section 5.48 of the Alcoholic Beverage Code. Accordingly, we conclude that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure in its entirety pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 5.48 of the Alcoholic Beverage 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,

Ronald J. Bounds
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RJB/lmt

Ref: ID# 194229

Enc. Submitted documents

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(w/o enclosures)