ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 26, 2004

Mr. Loren B. Smith
Olson & Olson, L.L.P.
2727 Allen Parkway, Suite 600
Houston, Texas 77019-2115

OR2004-2351

Dear Mr. Smith:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 199792.

The City of Friendswood Police Department (the "department"), which you represent, received a request for the criminal history of three named individuals. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses the common law right to privacy, which protects information if it is highly intimate or embarrassing, such that its release would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and the public has no legitimate interest in it. *Industrial Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668 (Tex. 1976). Where an individual's criminal history information has been compiled by a governmental entity, the information takes on a character that implicates the individual's right to privacy. *See United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749 (1989). However, information relating to routine traffic violations is not excepted from release under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy and *Reporters Committee*. *Cf.* Gov't Code § 411.082(2)(B). In this instance, the requestor asks the department for all records concerning three named individuals. In so doing, the request implicates these individuals' rights to privacy. Here, some of the information relates to routine traffic violations; therefore, it is not excepted from public disclosure under section 552.101 and *Reporters*

Committee. Normally, the remaining information would be protected from public disclosure under common law privacy as encompassed by section 552.101 of the Government Code. Here, however, the requestor has a special right of access pursuant to section 552.023 of the Government Code to information that is otherwise private because the requests state that the individuals about whom the information concerns have consented in writing to the release of the information to the requestor. Gov't Code § 552.023 (person or person's authorized representative has special right of access to information relating to person and protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect that person's privacy interests); *see id* § 552.229 (consent to release information under special right of access). Thus, in this case, the department must release the information to the requestor.

The department asks that this office issue a previous determination to allow the department to withhold information responsive to requests of this type concerning a compilation of a person's criminal history information. Given that the department may not withhold the information in this instance, we decline to grant the department's request for a previous determination.

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).

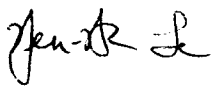
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following 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,



Yen-Ha Le
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

YHL/seg

Ref: ID# 199792

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Office of Personnel Management
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(w/o enclosures)