



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 16, 2005

Ms. Myrna S. Reingold
Galveston County Legal Department
123 Rosenberg, Suite 4127
Galveston, Texas 77550-1454

OR2005-07410

Dear Ms. Reingold:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 230447.

The Galveston County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney") received a request for a transcript of grand jury testimony given by a specific individual pertaining to two specific criminal cases. You claim that the requested information is not subject to the Act or in the alternative is excepted from disclosure pursuant to sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered your claims.

This office has concluded that a grand jury is not a governmental body that is subject to the Act so that records that are within the actual or constructive possession of a grand jury are not subject to disclosure under the Act. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.003(1)(B) (Act's definition of governmental body does not include judiciary), .0035 (access to information collected, assembled, or maintained by or for judiciary is governed by rules adopted by Supreme Court of Texas or other applicable laws and rules); Open Records Decision No. 513 at 3 (1988) (information held by grand jury, which is extension of judiciary for purposes of Act, is not itself subject to Act). When an individual or an entity acts at the direction of the grand jury as its agent, information prepared or collected by the agent is within the grand jury's constructive possession and is not subject to the Act. *See* Open Records Decision No. 513 at 3. Information that is not so held or maintained is subject to the Act and may be withheld from the public only if a specific exception to disclosure is shown to be applicable. *Id.* However, "the fact that information collected or prepared by the district attorney is submitted

to the grand jury, when taken alone, does not mean that the information is in the grand jury's constructive possession when the same information is also held by the district attorney." *Id.*

In this instance, you state the requested information is held by the district attorney as an agent for the grand jury. Thus, the requested information is in the constructive possession of the grand jury. Based on your representation we agree that the requested information is not subject to disclosure under the Act.¹

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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

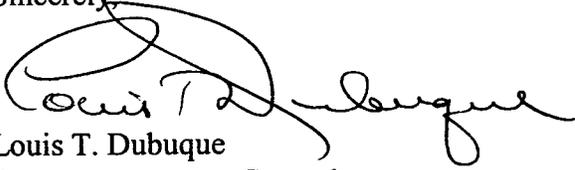
Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be

¹ As our ruling on this issue is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Louis T. Dubuque", written over a horizontal line.

Louis T. Dubuque
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LTD/seg

Ref: ID# 230447

c: Ms. Valerie W. Davenport
Davenport Legal Group
440 Louisiana, Suite 1210
Houston, Texas 77002