



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 17, 2005

Ms. Carol Longoria
Public Information Coordinator
The University of Texas System
Office of General Counsel
201 West Seventh Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2902

OR2005-10420

Dear Ms. Longoria:

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# 236501.

The University of Texas System (the "system") received two requests for information pertaining to the system's Office of Federal Relations (the "OFR") and its officers.¹ You state that you are releasing some of the requested information, but claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.106 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.111 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure "an interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency." Gov't Code § 552.111. Section 552.111 encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of this exception is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San*

¹You inform us that the system sought and received clarification from one of the requestors regarding the requested OFR documents. *See* Gov't Code § 552.222 (providing that if request for information is unclear, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify request).

Antonio, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990).

In Open Records Decision No. 615 (1993), this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined that section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, and opinions that reflect the policymaking processes of the governmental body. See Open Records Decision No. 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; see also *City of Garland v. The Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. See Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995). Furthermore, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events that are severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. See Open Records Decision No. 615 at 5. But, if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. See Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

You state that the documents submitted under tabs 6 and 7 “contain and/or outline advice and recommendations gleaned from internal discussions between [s]ystem personnel.” Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we conclude that the information we have marked consists of advice, recommendations, and opinions reflecting the policymaking processes of the system; therefore, this information may be withheld under section 552.111. However, we find that you have not demonstrated that the remaining information consists of internal communications consisting of advice, recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the system. Accordingly, none of the remaining information may be withheld under section 552.111.

Next, we address your claim of section 552.106 of the Government Code for the information under tab 5 and the remaining information under tab 6. Section 552.106(a) excepts from required public disclosure “[a] draft or working paper involved in the preparation of proposed legislation[.]” Gov't Code § 552.106(a). Section 552.106(a) ordinarily applies only to persons with a responsibility to prepare information and proposals for a legislative body. See Open Records Decision No. 460 at 1 (1987). The purpose of this exception is to encourage frank discussion on policy matters between the subordinates or advisors of a legislative body and the members of the legislative body; therefore, section 552.106 encompasses only policy judgments, recommendations, and proposals involved in the preparation of proposed legislation and does not except purely factual information from

public disclosure. *Id.* at 2. However, a comparison or analysis of factual information prepared to support proposed legislation is within the ambit of section 552.106. *Id.*

After reviewing the information at issue, we find that you have not established that this information consists of drafts or working paper involved in the preparation of proposed legislation for purposes of section 552.106. Therefore, we conclude that none of the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.106.

In summary, we conclude that the system may withhold the information we have marked pursuant to section 552.111 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released to the requestor.

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); *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 Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,



Caroline E. Cho
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CEC/sdk

Ref: ID# 236501

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Nicholas B. Schwellenbach
1219b Park Road NW
Washington, D.C. 20010
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Yahshoda Sampath
The Daily Texan
CMC 20122 E4100
Austin, Texas 78713
(w/o enclosures)