



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 5, 2005

Mr. John A. Kazen
Kazen, Meurer & Perez, L.L.P.
P.O. Box 6237
Laredo, Texas 78040

OR2005-10858

Dear Mr. Kazen:

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# 237297.

The Laredo Independent School District (the "school district"), which you represent, received a request for proof of residency for a named member of the school district's board of trustees, as well as the district's policy toward residency of board members. In his request, the requestor states that "a utility bill would suffice" to show proof of residency. You state that you have released responsive information but claim that a utility bill of the named board member is not public information. We have considered your arguments.

The Act is applicable to "public information." See Gov't Code § 552.021. "Public information" is defined as information that is collected, assembled, or maintained under a law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business:

- (1) by a governmental body; or
- (2) for a governmental body and the governmental body owns the information or has a right of access to it.

Gov't Code § 552.002(a). Thus, virtually all information in the physical possession of a governmental body is public information that is encompassed by the Act. *Id.* § 552.022(a)(1); see also Open Records Decision Nos. 549 at 4 (1990), 514 at 1-2 (1988). Likewise, the Act is applicable to information that a governmental body does not physically

possess, if the information is collected, assembled, or maintained for a governmental body, and the governmental body owns the information or has a right of access to it. Gov't Code § 552.002(a)(2); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 462 at 4 (1987) (Act applies to information collected or maintained by consultant if information relates to governmental body's official duties or business, consultant acts as agent of governmental body in collecting information, and governmental body has or is entitled to access to information). However, the Act does not require a governmental body to release information if the governmental body that receives the request has neither possession of the information nor a right of access to it. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 534 at 2-3 (1989), 518 at 2-3 (1989).

You state the school district "does not have possession of any individual [b]oard member's utility bill" and that it "does not collect, maintain, or assemble any [b]oard member's personal utility bills since they are not connected to the [d]istrict's official business." Based upon your representations, we conclude that a utility bill of the named board member does not constitute "information that is collected, assembled, or maintained under a law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business" by or for the school district. *See* Gov't Code § 552.021. Thus, the requested utility bill does not constitute public information, and the Act does not require the school district to release it 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).

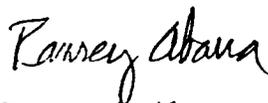
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records 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,



Ramsey A. Abarca
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RAA/sdk

Ref: ID# 237297

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Manuel Arechiga, Jr.
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Laredo, Texas 78041
(w/o enclosures)