ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 19, 2005

Mr. Steven D. Monté
Assistant City Attorney
Criminal Law and Police Division
City of Dallas
1400 South Lamar Street #300A
Dallas, Texas 75215-1801

OR2005-11385

Dear Mr. Monté:

You have asked whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 242165.

The Dallas Police Department (the "department") received a request for offense report number 771864-P. The department claims that the requested information is excepted from public disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply not later than the tenth business day after the date of receiving the written request. The department states it received the present request for information on November 18, 2005. The department did not request a decision from this office until December 7, 2005. Consequently, the department failed to comply with section 552.301(b) of the Government Code.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the information is public and must be released. Information that is presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information to overcome this presumption. *See Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). This office has held that a compelling

reason exists to withhold information when the information is confidential by another source of law. *See* Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977) (presumption of openness overcome by a showing that the information is made confidential by another source of law or affects third party interests). The applicability of section 552.101 is such a compelling reason.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Section 261.201 of the Family Code reads in part as follows:

> (a) The following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:
>
> > (1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and
> >
> > (2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

We believe that the requested information consists of reports, records, and working papers used or developed in an investigation made under chapter 261 of the Family Code. Because you have not cited any specific rule that the investigating agency has adopted with regard to the release of this type of information, we assume that no such regulation exists. Given that assumption, the requested information is confidential pursuant to section 261.201 of the Family Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (construing predecessor statute). Accordingly, you must not release the requested information 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).

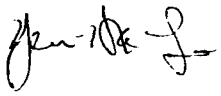
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records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



Yen-Ha Le
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

YHL/sdk

Ref: ID# 242165

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Benita Harden
18788 Marsh Lane #911
Dallas, Texas 75287
(w/o enclosures)