ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 31, 2006

Mr. Brody Shanklin
Assistant District Attorney
Denton County
P.O. Box 2850
Denton, Texas 76202

OR2006-01039

Dear Mr. Shanklin:

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# 241265.

The Denton County District Clerk's Office (the "county") received a request for a database showing cases handled by the 393rd District Court, attorneys appointed in ad litem cases, amounts paid to those attorneys, and whether the individuals represented by ad litem attorneys were ordered to reimburse the county. You claim that the requested information is not subject to disclosure under the Act. In the alternative, you claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.[1]

You note that the Act does not apply to records of the judiciary. Gov't Code § 552.003(B). The purposes and limits of the judiciary exception were construed in *Benavides v. Lee,* 665 S.W.2d 151 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1983, no writ). The court explained the purpose of the judiciary exception:

[1]You inform us that the information submitted as Exhibit D was provided for informational purposes only and is not responsive to these requests. This decision does not address the public availability of that information.

> The judiciary exception . . . is important to safeguard judicial proceedings and maintain the independence of the judicial branch of government, preserving statutory and case law already governing access to judicial records. But it must not be extended to every governmental entity having any connection with the judiciary.

Id. at 152. Thus, to fall within the judiciary exception, the document must contain information that pertains to judicial proceedings. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 527 (1989) (Court Reporters Certification Board not part of judiciary because its records do not pertain to judicial proceedings), 204 (1978) (information held by county judge that does not pertain to proceedings before county court subject to Act).

The records submitted to this office for review relate to judicial proceedings. Because these records are maintained by the county for the district court, the county need not release them under the Act. Gov't Code § 552.0035 (access to information maintained by or for judiciary is governed by rules adopted by supreme court); *see* Tex. R. Jud. Admin. 12 (public access to judicial records); Attorney General Opinion DM-166 (1992).[2]

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

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[2]As our ruling on this issue is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument.

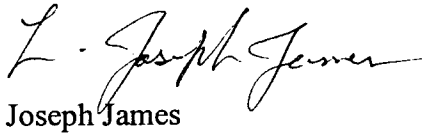
free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

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,



L. Joseph James
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LJJ/segh

Ref: ID# 241265

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Dave Moore
Staff Writer
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(w/o enclosures)