



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 7, 2006

Mr. Robert J. Gervais
City Attorney
City of Texas City
P.O. Drawer 2608
Texas City, Texas 77592-2608

OR2006-10424

Dear Mr. Gervais:

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# 259676.

The City of Texas City (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You state that some of the requested information is being made available to the requestor, but claim that the submitted internal affairs investigation report is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section excepts from disclosure information deemed confidential by statute, such as section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. You state that the city is a civil service city under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. Section 143.089 contemplates two different types of personnel files: a police officer's civil service file that the civil service director is required to maintain, and an internal file that the police department may maintain for its own use. Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a), (g). In cases in which a police department investigates a police officer's misconduct and takes disciplinary action against an officer, it is required by section 143.089(a)(2) to place all investigatory records relating to the investigation and disciplinary action, including background documents such as complaints, witness statements, and documents of like nature from individuals who were not in a supervisory capacity, in the police officer's civil service file maintained under

section 143.089(a).¹ *Abbott v. City of Corpus Christi*, 109 S.W.3d 113, 122 (Tex. App.—Austin 2003, no pet.). All investigatory materials in a case resulting in disciplinary action are “from the employing department” when they are held by or in possession of the department because of its investigation into a police officer’s misconduct, and the department must forward them to the civil service commission for placement in the civil service personnel file. *Id.* Such records are subject to release under the Act. See Local Gov’t Code § 143.089(f); Open Records Decision No. 562 at 6 (1990). However, information maintained in a police department’s internal file pursuant to section 143.089(g) is confidential and must not be released. *City of San Antonio v. Texas Attorney Gen.*, 851 S.W.2d 946, 949 (Tex. App.—Austin 1993, writ denied).

You inform us that the submitted information pertains to an investigation that did not result in disciplinary action against the officer. You indicate that this information is maintained in the police department’s internal files concerning the named officer. We note, however, that the submitted information includes an offense report from the city’s police department. Because the city’s police department conducted a criminal investigation, this information is maintained independently, separate and apart from the personnel files of the city’s police department. The city may not engraft the confidentiality afforded to records under section 143.089(g) to records that exist independently of the internal files. Accordingly, we conclude that the city may not withhold the offense report under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code. However, based on your representations and our review of the documents at issue, we agree that the remaining information is confidential pursuant to section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

Section 552.101 is also applicable to section 58.007 of the Family Code. Juvenile law enforcement records relating to conduct that occurred on or after September 1, 1997 are confidential under section 58.007. Section 58.007(c) reads as follows:

Except as provided by Subsection (d), law enforcement records and files concerning a child and information stored, by electronic means or otherwise, concerning the child from which a record or file could be generated may not be disclosed to the public and shall be:

- (1) if maintained on paper or microfilm, kept separate from adult files and records;
- (2) if maintained electronically in the same computer system as records or files relating to adults, be accessible under controls that are

¹Chapter 143 prescribes the following types of disciplinary actions: removal, suspension, demotion, and uncompensated duty. See Local Gov’t Code §§ 143.051-143.055.

separate and distinct from controls to access electronic data concerning adults; and

(3) maintained on a local basis only and not sent to a central state or federal depository, except as provided by Subchapter B.

Fam. Code § 58.007(c). The submitted offense report contains information that involves juvenile conduct occurring after September 1, 1997. None of the exceptions in section 58.007 appears to apply. Therefore, the submitted offense report is confidential pursuant to section 58.007(c) of the Family Code and the city must withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

To conclude, in conjunction with section 552.101 of the Government Code the city must withhold the submitted offense report under section 58.007 of the Family Code and the remaining information under section 143.089 of the Local Government Code.

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).

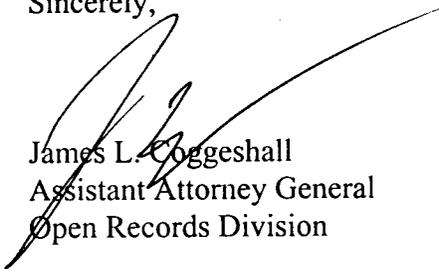
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental

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. 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,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/eb

Ref: ID# 259676

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. T.J. Aulds
Galveston County Daily News
c/o Robert J. Gervais
City Attorney
City of Texas City
P.O. Drawer 2608
Texas City, Texas 77592-2608
(w/o enclosures)