



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 11, 2006

Ms. YuShan Chang
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2006-11898

Dear Ms Chang:

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# 261732.

The Houston Police Department (the "department") received a request for any non-privileged or confidential records from the personnel files of five named officers. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.1175, 552.130, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.¹

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. We understand that the City of Houston 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).

¹ We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

A document relating to a police officer's alleged misconduct may not be placed in his civil service personnel file if there is insufficient evidence to sustain the charge of misconduct. *Id.* § 143.089(b). Information that reasonably relates to a police officer's employment relationship with the police department and that is 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. San Antonio Express-News*, 47 S.W.3d 556 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 2000, pet. denied); *City of San Antonio v. Tex. Attorney General*, 851 S.W.2d 946, 949 (Tex. App.—Austin 1993, writ denied).

You state that the submitted information in Exhibits 4 and 5 is maintained in the department's internal files pursuant to section 143.089(g). Based on your representations and our review, we conclude that this information is confidential pursuant to section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code.² Therefore, Exhibits 4 and 5 must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

We now turn to the documents in Exhibits 2 and 3. Section 552.101 also encompasses section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code, which provides in part:

(b) The department shall maintain an investigatory file that relates to a disciplinary action against a fire fighter or police officer that was overturned on appeal, or any document in the possession of the department that relates to a charge of misconduct against a fire fighter or police officer, regardless of whether the charge is sustained, only in a file created by the department for the department's use. The department may only release information in those investigatory files or documents relating to a charge of misconduct:

- (1) to another law enforcement agency or fire department;
- (2) to the office of a district or United States attorney; or
- (3) in accordance with Subsection (c).

(c) The department head or the department head's designee may forward a document that relates to a disciplinary action against a fire fighter or police officer to the [civil service] director or the director's designee for inclusion in the fire fighter's or police officer's personnel file maintained under Sections 143.089(a)-(f) [of the Local Government Code] only if:

- (1) disciplinary action was actually taken against the fire fighter or police officer;

² Section 143.089(g) requires a police or fire department that receives a request for information maintained in a file under section 143.089(g) to refer that person to the civil service director or the director's designee.

- (2) the document shows the disciplinary action taken; and
- (3) the document includes at least a brief summary of the facts on which the disciplinary action was based.

Local Gov't Code § 143.1214(b)-(c). You state that the information in Exhibits 2 and 3 is maintained in the Internal Affairs Division ("IAD") investigatory files of the department. You inform us that the information in Exhibit 2 relates to an IAD investigation in which the allegation was not sustained and no disciplinary action was taken. You state that the information in Exhibit 3 relates to an IAD investigation that did result in disciplinary action under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. You also state that the department has forwarded documents relating to this remaining allegation that meets the conditions of section 143.1214(c) to the named officer's personnel files maintained under section 143.089(a) of the Local Government Code.³ Finally, you state that this information does not meet all of the conditions of section 143.1214(c). Based on your representations and our review, we conclude that Exhibits 2 and 3 are subject to section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

In summary, in conjunction with section 552.101 of the Government Code, the department must withhold Exhibits 4 and 5 under section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code, and Exhibits 2 and 3 under section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code. As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.

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

³ Section 143.089(a) of the Local Government Code provides for the existence of a civil service file that must contain certain types of information relating to a police officer. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a).

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,



Shelli Egger
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SE/sdk

Ref: ID# 261732

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Q. Tate Williams
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(w/o enclosures)