



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

April 13, 2007

Ms. Stephanie L. Miller
Assistant County Attorney
Johnson County Attorney's Office
204 South Buffalo Avenue, Fourth Floor, Suite 410
Cleburne, Texas 76033-5404

OR2007-04155

Dear Ms. Miller:

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# 276767.

The Johnson County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for information relating to a specified case number. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the information you submitted.

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 exception encompasses information that other statutes make confidential. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides in part:

(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 [the Family 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 [chapter 261 of the Family Code] and the identity of the person making the report; and

(2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, and working papers used or developed in an investigation

under [chapter 261 of the Family Code] or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a); *see also id.* § 261.001(1), (4) (defining “abuse” and “neglect” for purposes of Fam. Code ch. 261). Because the information at issue consists of files, reports, records, communications, or working papers used or developed in an investigation under chapter 261 of the Family Code, we find that it falls within the scope of section 261.201(a). You state that the sheriff has not adopted any rule that governs the release of this type of information. Based on your representation and our review of the submitted information, we conclude that the information is confidential in its entirety under section 261.201 of the Family Code and must be withheld from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.¹ *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (addressing predecessor statute). Furthermore, because section 261.201(a) protects all “files, reports, records, communications, or working papers” relating to an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect, the sheriff must not release front-page offense or arrest report information in such cases.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

¹As we are able to make this determination, we do not address your claim under section 552.108 of the Government Code.

²We note that if the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services has created a file on this case, the child’s parent(s) may have the statutory right to review the file. *See* Fam. Code § 261.201(g).

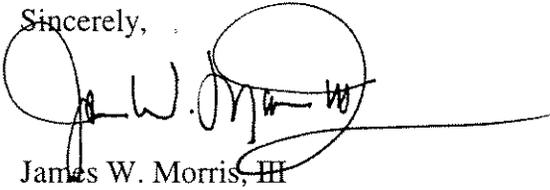
free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James W. Morris, III', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/jb

Ref: ID# 276767

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Jesus Tanguma
2531 Tommy's Court
Alvarado, Texas 76009
(w/o enclosures)