



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

April 16, 2007

Lt. William Ryan
Pharr Police Department
1900 South Cage
Pharr, Texas 78577

OR2007-04219

Dear Lt. Ryan:

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# 275814.

The Pharr Police Department (the "department") received a request for information regarding the arrest of a named individual, including the personnel record of any officer involved in the arrest. You state that you have released some information to the requestor, but claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.102 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Initially, we must address the department's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code, which prescribes the procedures that a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days of receiving the written request. The department received the request for information on January 12, 2007.

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.

The submitted documents indicate the department requested clarification of the request for information on January 18, 2007. Gov't Code § 552.222 (if request for information is unclear, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify request); Open Records Decision No. 663 (1999) (deadlines tolled while governmental body awaits clarification). You inform us that the requestor replied to the clarification request on January 25, 2007. However, you did not request a ruling from this office until February 5, 2007. Accordingly, we conclude the department failed to comply with the procedural requirements mandated by section 552.301.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless the governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). Generally, a governmental body may demonstrate a compelling reason to withhold information by showing that the information is made confidential by another source of law or affects third-party interests. *See* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Because sections 552.101 and 552.102 can provide compelling reasons to withhold information, we will address your arguments concerning these exceptions.

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(g) of the Local Government Code. We understand you to assert that the City of Pharr 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). *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.* Chapter 143 prescribes the following types of disciplinary actions: removal, suspension, demotion, and uncompensated duty. *See* Local Gov't Code

§§ 143.051-143.055. Such records are subject to release under chapter 552 of the Government Code. *See id.* § 143.089(f); Open Records Decision No. 562 at 6 (1990).

However, information that reasonably relates to an 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. Texas Attorney Gen.*, 851 S.W.2d 946, 949 (Tex. App.—Austin 1993, writ denied).

We understand you to assert that the submitted information is kept in the officer's section 143.089(g) file as a personnel file created and maintained by the department.² Based on these representations, we conclude that this information is confidential under section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code and, therefore, must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.³ 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 will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the

² Section 143.089(g) requires a police department who 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.

³ We note that the submitted documents contain a periodic evaluation of the officer as set forth in chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. We assume that this same information is also contained in the officer's civil service file in accordance with section 143.089(a).

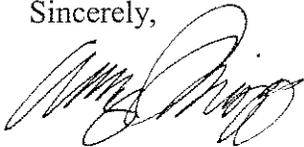
Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor 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,



Amy L.S. Shipp
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ALS/sdk

Ref: ID# 275814

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Joseph A. Connors III
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(w/o enclosures)