



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 1, 2007

Mr. David C. Newell
Assistant County Attorney
Fort Bend County
301 Jackson Street, Suite 728
Richmond, Texas 77469-3108

OR2007-05063

Dear Mr. Newell:

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# 277895.

The Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for all incident reports for a named juvenile. You claim that the requested information 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." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. Section 261.201(a) of the Family Code provides as follows:

(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 this 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, audiotapes, videotapes, 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). You state that incident report 05-17567 was used or developed in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect. Thus, this information is within the scope of section 261.201 of the Family Code. You have not indicated that the sheriff has adopted a rule that governs the release of this type of information. We therefore assume no such rule exists. Given this assumption, we conclude that the incident report 05-17567 is confidential under section 261.201 of the Family Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (predecessor statute). Accordingly, the sheriff must withhold this information under section 552.101 of the Government Code as information confidential by law.

Section 552.101 also encompasses Family Code section 58.007. Juvenile law enforcement records relating to conduct that occurred on or after September 1, 1997 are confidential under section 58.007. For purposes of section 58.007, "child" means a person who is ten years of age or older and under seventeen years of age at the time of the reported conduct. *See* Fam. Code § 51.02(2). The relevant language of section 58.007(c) reads as follows:

(c) 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 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.

Incident report 06-10932 involves juvenile conduct that occurred after September 1, 1997. Incident reports 06-12722, 07-588, and 06-247 pertain to reports of a juvenile runaway that occurred after September 1, 1997. All of this conduct is within the scope of section 58.007. *See id.* § 51.03(b)(3) (defining "conduct indicating a need for supervision" to include "the voluntary absence of a child from the child's home without the consent of the child's parent or guardian for a substantial length of time or without intent to return"). It does not

appear that any of the exceptions in section 58.007 apply; therefore, incident reports 06-10932, 06-12722, 07-588, and 06-247 are confidential pursuant to section 58.007(c) of the Family Code. The sheriff must withhold these reports from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

In summary, the sheriff must withhold incident report 05-17567 under section 261.201 of the Family Code and incident reports 06-10932, 06-12722, 07-588, and 06-247 under section 58.007 of the Family Code, both in conjunction with section 552.101 of the 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).

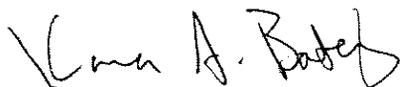
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

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. 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 "Kara A. Batey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kara" being the most prominent.

Kara A. Batey
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KAB/mcf

Ref: ID# 277895

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Shirley L. Bonner
4710 Opalbrook Court
Fresno, Texas 77545
(w/o enclosures)