



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 11, 2007

Mr. Nathan Barrow
Assistant City Attorney
City of Fort Worth
1000 Throckmorton Street
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2007-07290

Dear Mr. Barrow:

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# 285109.

The Fort Worth Fire Department (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to events involving the requestor, a department fire fighter. 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 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 deemed confidential by statute, such as section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. We understand 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 fire fighter's civil service file that the civil service director is required to maintain, and an internal file that the fire department may maintain for its own use. Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a), (g). In cases in which a fire department investigates a fire fighter's misconduct and takes disciplinary action against the fire fighter, 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 a like nature from individuals who were not in a supervisory capacity, in

the fire fighter's civil service file maintained under section 143.089(a).¹ *See Abbott v. 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 fire department because of its investigation into a fire fighter's misconduct, and the fire 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 chapter 552 of the Government Code. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(f); Open Records Decision No. 562 at 6 (1990). However, information maintained in a fire 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 represent that the submitted information is maintained in the department's internal personnel files of the individuals at issue pursuant to section 143.089(g). Based on the department's representation, we find that the submitted information is confidential pursuant to section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code, and conclude it must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

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).

¹ Chapter 143 prescribes the following types of disciplinary actions: removal, suspension, demotion, and uncompensated duty. *See id.* §§ 143.051-.055.

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,



L. Joseph James
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LJJ/eeg

Ref: ID# 285109

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Eng. Artie Dawson
721 Thompson Street
Everman, Texas 76140
(w/o enclosures)