



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

August 22, 2007

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General Counsel  
Office of the Inspector General  
Texas Department of Criminal Justice  
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Ms. Patricia Fleming  
Assistant General Counsel  
Office of the General Counsel  
Texas Department of Criminal Justice  
P.O. Box 4004  
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OR2007-10943

Dear Mr. West and Ms. Fleming:

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#287398.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice ("the department") received a request for reprimand forms, employee offense reports, and pre-hearing investigation reports pertaining to two named employees. The department's Office of the General Counsel (the "OGC") and its Office of the Inspector General (the "OIG") have submitted separate briefs as well as separate documents that each seeks to withhold from disclosure. The OIG seeks to withhold the information it has submitted under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.134 of the Government Code. The OGC seeks to withhold the submitted information under sections 552.101 and 552.134 of the Government Code. The OIG informs us that there is

no responsive information with respect to one of the named employees.<sup>1</sup> The OIG states that it has released some of the requested information with redactions pursuant to the previous determination issued by this office in Open Records Letter No. 2005-01067 (2005).<sup>2</sup> The OIG further states that it will redact social security numbers pursuant to section 552.147 of the Government Code.<sup>3</sup> We have considered the claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted information.

We must initially 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. Section 552.301(e-1) provides the following:

A governmental body that submits written comments to the attorney general under Subsection (e)(1)(A) shall send a copy of those comments to the person who requested the information from the governmental body. If the written comments disclose or contain the substance of the information requested, the copy of the comments provided to the person must be a redacted copy.

Gov't Code § 552.301(e-1). The OIG sent to the requestor a copy of its written comments submitted to this office pursuant to section 552.301(e)(1)(A). The OIG redacted its entire discussion of the exceptions asserted from the copy. After review of the copy of the OIG's brief sent to the requestor, we conclude that the OIG redacted information from the copy that does not disclose or contain the substance of the information requested; therefore, we conclude that the OIG failed to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301(e-1) of the Government Code.

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 id.*

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<sup>1</sup>We note the Act does not require a governmental body to disclose information that did not exist when the request for information was received. *Econ. Opportunities Dev. Corp. v. Bustamante*, 562 S.W.2d 266 (Tex.App.-San Antonio 1978, writ dismissed); Open Records Decision No. 452 at 3 (1986).

<sup>2</sup>Open Records Letter No. 2005-01067 serves as a previous determination that the present and former home addresses and telephone numbers, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former employees of the department, regardless of whether the current or former employee complies with section 552.1175 of the Government Code, are excepted from disclosure under section 552.117(a)(3) of the Government Code.

<sup>3</sup>We note that section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act.

§ 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to section 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). This office has held that a compelling reason exists to withhold information when third party interests are at stake or when information is made confidential by another source of law. See Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977) (construing predecessor statute). The OIG contends that some of the submitted information is excepted under section 552.108 of the Government Code. However, the department has not demonstrated a compelling reason for withholding the information at issue under section 552.108. See Open Records Decision No. 473 at 2 (1987) (discretionary exceptions under Act can be waived); *but see* Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991) (when governmental body fails to timely seek attorney general decision under the Act, need of another governmental body may provide compelling reason for withholding requested information). Therefore, the department may not withhold any portion of the information at issue under section 552.108. However, the applicability of sections 552.101 and 552.134 can provide compelling reasons to withhold information; we will therefore address the applicability of these exceptions.

Both the OIG and the OGC raise section 552.134 of the Government Code. Section 552.134 relates to information about inmates of the department and provides in relevant part as follows:

Except as provided by Subsection (b) or by Section 552.029, information obtained or maintained by the [department] is excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021 if it is information about an inmate who is confined in a facility operated by or under a contract with the department.

Gov't Code § 552.134(a). Section 552.134 is explicitly made subject to section 552.029 of the Government Code, which provides in relevant part as follows:

Notwithstanding . . . Section 552.134, the following information about an inmate who is confined in a facility operated by or under a contract with the [department] is subject to required disclosure under Section 552.021:

...

(8) basic information regarding the death of an inmate in custody, an incident involving the use of force, or an alleged crime involving an inmate.

*Id.* § 552.029(8). Basic information includes the time and place of the incident, names of inmates and department officials directly involved, a brief narrative of the incident, a brief description of any injuries sustained, and information regarding criminal charges or disciplinary actions filed as a result of the incident. In this instance, the submitted

information pertains to investigations of incidents involving the use of force against inmates, and alleged crimes involving inmates. The OIG states that it will release basic information regarding these incidents pursuant to section 552.029(8). Upon review, we conclude that with the exception of basic information, the department must withhold the submitted information under section 552.134 of the Government Code.<sup>4</sup>

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

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<sup>4</sup>As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the OIG's or OGC's remaining arguments against disclosure.

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 'Holly R. Davis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Holly R. Davis  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

HRD/eeg

Ref: ID# 287398

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Jennifer Arnold  
205 County Road 4523  
Avery, Texas 75554  
(w/o enclosures)