



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

October 18, 2007

Mr. Charles H. Weir  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of San Antonio  
P.O. Box 83996  
San Antonio, Texas 78283-3966

OR2007-13665

Dear Mr. Weir:

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# 292246.

The San Antonio Police Department (the "department") received a request for a specified police report. 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.

Initially, we address your obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code. This section 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(b) requires the governmental body to ask for the attorney general's decision and state the exceptions to disclosure not later than the tenth business day after the date of its receipt of the written request for information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). You state that the department received the present request on July 20, 2007. However, you did not ask this office for a decision or raise section 552.101 until August 13, 2007. Therefore, the department failed to raise section 552.101 within the ten-business-day deadline prescribed by section 552.301(b).

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with 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.* § 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). Normally, a compelling reason for non-disclosure exists where some other source of law makes the information confidential or where third party interests are at stake. Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977). Because section 552.101 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to withhold this information, we will address your argument concerning this exception.

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:

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 this chapter 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 this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). You indicate that the submitted information consists of files, reports, records, communications, or working papers used or developed in an investigation under chapter 261; therefore, this information is within the scope of section 261.201 of the Family Code. *See id.* §§ 101.003(a) (defining “child” for purposes of section 261.201 as “person under 18 years of age who is not and has not been married or who has not had the disabilities of minority removed for general purposes”), 261.001(1)(c) (definition of “child abuse” includes “physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child”). You do not inform us that the department 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 submitted information is confidential pursuant to section 261.201 of the Family Code, and that the

department must withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (predecessor statute).<sup>1</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

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<sup>1</sup>We note that the requestor, as a parent of a child who is the subject of reported abuse or neglect, may have a right of access to certain abuse and neglect records maintained by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services ("DFPS"). Section 261.201(g) of the Family Code provides that DFPS, upon request and subject to its own rules, shall provide to the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of a child who is the subject of reported abuse or neglect information concerning the reported abuse or neglect that would otherwise be confidential under this section if DFPS has edited the information to protect the confidentiality of the identity of the person who made the report and any other person whose life or safety may be endangered by the disclosure. Fam. Code § 261.201(g).

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 that reads "Kara A. Batey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "y" at the end.

Kara A. Batey  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

KAB/jh

Ref: ID# 292246

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Gabriel De La Cruz  
734 Oban  
San Antonio, Texas 78216  
(w/o enclosures)