



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 6, 2008

Mr. James Mu
Assistant General Counsel
Office of the General Counsel
Texas Department of Criminal Justice
P.O. Box 4004
Huntsville, Texas 77342-4004

Mr. John C. West
General Counsel
Office of the Inspector General
Texas Department of Criminal Justice
4616 Howard Lane Suite 250
Austin, Texas 78728

OR2008-13633

Dear Mr. Mu and Mr. West:

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# 324044.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for information relating to a use of force involving a named inmate. Both the Office of the General Counsel (the "OGC") and the Office of the Inspector General (the "OIG") state that some of the requested information either has been or will be released. Both the OGC and the OIG have submitted information that the department seeks to withhold under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.134 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.134 of the Government Code encompasses information relating to inmates of the department. Section 552.134(a) states:

- (a) Except as provided by Subsection (b) or by Section 552.029 [of the Government Code], information obtained or maintained by the [department] is excepted from [required public disclosure] 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 552.029 of the Government Code states:

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 the inmate.

Id. § 552.029(8). Thus, the legislature explicitly made section 552.134 subject to section 552.029.

Both the OGC and the OIG claim section 552.134 for all of the information that each has submitted. We find that this exception is generally applicable to the submitted information. We note, however, that the information in question pertains to two related incidents, both of which involved uses of force. Basic information about those incidents is subject to disclosure under section 552.029(8). Basic information under section 552.029(8) includes the time and place of the incident, the names of inmates and of department employees who were involved, a brief narrative of the incident, a brief description of any injuries sustained by anyone involved, and information regarding any criminal charges or disciplinary actions that were filed as a result of the incident. With the exception of the basic information that must be released under section 552.029(8), the department must withhold the submitted information under section 552.134. As we are able to make this determination, we need not address the department's other exceptions to 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 file suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3). If the governmental body does not file suit over 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).

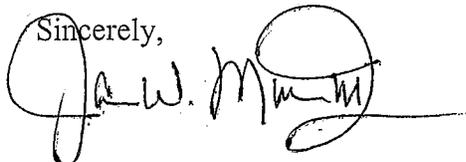
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the

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 challenge 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,


James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/jh

Ref: ID# 324044

Enc: Submitted information

c: Mr. Brian Sasser
c/o Mr. James Mu
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(w/o enclosures)