



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

October 29, 2008

Mr. David K. Walker  
County Attorney  
Montgomery County  
207 West Phillips, 1st Floor  
Conroe, Texas 77301

OR2008-14687

Dear Mr. Walker:

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# 326941.

The Montgomery County Attorney's Office (the "county attorney") received a request for several categories of information pertaining to bonds and bond forfeitures occurring over a specified five year period. You assert that you have reached an agreement with the requestor regarding the release of a portion of the requested information. You claim that the submitted information is not subject to disclosure under the Act. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

You state that the information pertaining to bond forfeitures consists of records maintained by the District and County Clerks' Offices for Montgomery County on behalf of the judiciary.<sup>2</sup> Records of the judiciary are not subject to required public disclosure under the

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<sup>1</sup>We assume that the representative sample of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

<sup>2</sup>You note that these records are available for viewing through the District and County Clerks' Offices.

Act.<sup>3</sup> See Gov't Code §§ 552.003(1)(A), (B) (definition of "governmental body" under Act specifically excludes the judiciary), .021 (Act generally requires disclosure of information maintained by "governmental body"). Based on your representations and our review, we find that the information at issue consists of records of the judiciary that are not subject to release under the Act. We therefore conclude you do not need to release the submitted information in response to the present request.

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).

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<sup>3</sup>Records of the judiciary may be public pursuant to other sources of law. Attorney General Opinions DM-166 at 2-3 1992) (public has general right to inspect and copy judicial records), H-826 (1976); Open Records Decision No. 25 (1974); see *Star Telegram, Inc. v. Walker*, 834 S.W.2d 54, 57 (Tex. 1992) (documents filed with courts are generally considered public and must be released).

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,



Matt Entsminger  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MRE/jb

Ref: ID# 326941

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Renée C. Lee  
c/o Mr. David K. Walker  
Montgomery County  
207 West Phillips, 1st Floor  
Conroe, Texas 77301  
(w/o enclosures)