



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

GREG ABBOTT

October 29, 2008

Mr. Andrew L. Quittner
Assistant City Attorney
Legal Department
City of San Marcos
630 East Hopkins
San Marcos, Texas 78666

OR2008-14706

Dear Mr. Quittner:

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#326267.

The City of San Marcos (the "city") received a request for information regarding an incident involving a San Marcos police officer. The city received a second request for all disciplinary action taken against the San Marcos police officer, including the specific incident. You state that you have released some of the information to the requestors. You claim that the submitted 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.

We note that the second request seeks all disciplinary action taken against the officer at issue. However, you have only submitted information relating to the one incident. To the extent any additional information responsive to this request existed on the date the city received the request, we assume you have released it. If you have not released any such records, you must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible).

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 excepts from disclosure information deemed confidential by statute, such as section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. You state 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 police officer's civil service file that the civil service director is required to maintain, and an internal file that the police

department may maintain for its own use. Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a), (g). The officer's civil service file must contain certain specified items, including commendations, periodic evaluations by the police officer's supervisor, and documents relating to any misconduct in which the police department took disciplinary action against the officer under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. *Id.* § 143.089(a)(1)-(2). Chapter 143 prescribes the following types of disciplinary actions: removal, suspension, demotion, and uncompensated duty. *Id.* §§ 143.051-.055. In cases in which a police department investigates a police officer's misconduct and takes disciplinary action against an officer, 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 similar documents from individuals who were not in a supervisory capacity, in the police officer's civil service file maintained under section 143.089(a). *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 are in the possession of the department because of its investigation into a police officer's misconduct, and the department must forward them to the civil service commission for placement in the civil service personnel file. *Id.* Such records may not be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(f); Open Records Decision No. 562 at 6 (1990).

Subsection (g) of section 143.089 authorizes the police department to maintain, for its own use, a separate and independent internal personnel file relating to a police officer. *See id.* § 143.089(g). Section 143.089(g) provides as follows:

A fire or police department may maintain a personnel file on a fire fighter or police officer employed by the department for the department's use, but the department may not release any information contained in the department file to any agency or person requesting information relating to a fire fighter or police officer. The department shall refer to the director or the director's designee a person or agency that requests information that is maintained in the fire fighter's or police officer's personnel file.

Id. In *City of San Antonio v. Texas Attorney General*, 851 S.W.2d 946 (Tex. App.—Austin 1993, writ denied), the court addressed a request for information contained in a police officer's personnel file maintained by the department for its use and the applicability of section 143.089(g) to that file. The records included in the departmental personnel file related to complaints against the police officer for which no disciplinary action was taken. The court determined that section 143.089(g) made these records confidential. *See City of San Antonio*, 851 S.W.2d at 949; *see also City of San Antonio v. San Antonio Express-News*, 47 S.W.3d 556 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 2000, no pet.) (restricting confidentiality under Local Gov't Code § 143.089(g) to "information reasonably related to

a police officer's employment relationship"); Attorney General Opinion JC-0257 at 6-7 (2000) (addressing functions of Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a) and (g) files).

You inform us that the submitted information is an internal affairs investigation of an officer that did not result in disciplinary action. You state that this information is maintained in the San Marcos police department's internal files concerning the named officer. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude that some of the submitted information must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code. However, the submitted information includes an incident report and veterinary records. While these reports may be maintained in the named officer's personnel file, they are also records maintained independently of the police officer's personnel file. The city may not engraft the confidentiality afforded to records under section 143.089(g) to records that exist independently of the internal files. Accordingly, we conclude that the city may not withhold the incident report and veterinary records under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code. However, we note that portions of the information within the incident report are subject to section 522.130 of the Government Code.¹ Thus, we will address that exception.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information that relates a motor vehicle operator's license, driver's license, motor vehicle title, or registration issued by a Texas agency. Gov't Code § 552.130(a)(1), (2). Accordingly, the city must withhold the Texas motor vehicle record information that we have marked.

In summary, with the exception of the incident report and veterinary records, the city must withhold the submitted personnel file under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code. Within the incident report, the city must withhold the Texas motor vehicle record information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.

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

¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

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,



Christina Alvarado
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CA/ma

Ref: ID#326267

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Sandra Ibarra
KABB Assignment Editor
c/o Mr. Andrew L. Quittner
Assistant City Attorney
Legal Department
City of San Marcos
630 East Hopkins
San Marcos, Texas 78666
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. David Lutzweit
c/o Mr. Andrew L. Quittner
Assistant City Attorney
Legal Department
City of San Marcos
630 East Hopkins
San Marcos, Texas 78666
(w/o enclosures)