



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 13, 2010

Mr. C. Patrick Phillips
Assistant City Attorney
City of Fort Worth
1000 Throckmorton Street, Third Floor
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2010-10338

Dear Mr. Phillips:

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# 386203 (PIR No. W000577).

The City of Fort Worth (the "city") received a request for the personnel file of a named city police officer. You state that some of the requested information either has been or will be released. You claim that most of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the information you submitted.²

¹You state that social security numbers and Texas motor vehicle record information have been redacted from the responsive records pursuant to section 552.147 of the Government Code and previous determinations issued to the city under section 552.130 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.147(b) (authorizing governmental body to redact living person's social security number from public release without necessity of requesting attorney general's decision under Act); Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (previous determinations).

²To the extent that the "excerpt" of responsive information submitted as Exhibit D is a representative sample of the requested information, this letter ruling assumes that Exhibit D is truly representative of the requested information as a whole. This ruling neither reaches nor authorizes the city to withhold any information that is substantially different from the submitted information. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(e)(1)(D), .302; Open Records Decision Nos. 499 at 6 (1988), 497 at 4 (1988).

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 exception encompasses information that other statutes make confidential. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with section 143.089 of the Local Government Code.³ Section 143.089 provides for the existence of two different types of personnel files relating to a police officer, including one that must be maintained as part of the officer's civil service file and another that the police department may maintain for its own internal use. *See* 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 any instance in which the police department took disciplinary action against the officer under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. *See id.* § 143.089(a)(1)-(2). Chapter 143 prescribes the following types of disciplinary actions: removal, suspension, demotion, and uncompensated duty. *See id.* § 143.051 *et seq.* 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 documents of like nature 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). Information relating to alleged misconduct or disciplinary action taken must be removed from the police officer's civil service file if the police department determines that there is insufficient evidence to sustain the charge of misconduct or that the disciplinary action was taken without just cause. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(b)-(c).

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. 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

³You note that the city is a civil service municipality under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code.

designee a person or agency that requests information that is maintained in the fire fighter's or police officer's personnel file.

Id. § 143.089(g). 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 police 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 the records confidential. *See id.* 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 or fire fighter'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 contend that the information submitted as Exhibit C is confidential under section 143.089(g). You state that the information in question is contained in a personnel file relating to the named officer that the city police department maintains for its own use. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude that Exhibit C must generally be withheld from the requestor under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code. In this instance, however, the information in question includes records of disciplinary suspensions imposed on the officer under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. The records of the suspensions must also be placed in the officer's civil service personnel file pursuant to section 143.089(a)(2) of the Local Government Code. *See Abbott v. Corpus Christi*, 109 S.W.3d at 122. Because information maintained in the officer's civil service file may not be withheld under section 552.101 on the basis of section 143.089, the records of the suspensions must be released to the requestor, unless the city has already done so. *See Local Gov't Code § 143.089(f); ORD 562 at 6.*

You also raise section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy, which protects information that is highly intimate or embarrassing, such that its release would be highly objectionable to a person of ordinary sensibilities, and of no legitimate public interest. *See Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). Personal financial information that relates only to an individual ordinarily satisfies the first element of the common-law privacy test, but the public has a legitimate interest in the essential facts about a financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 600 at 9-12* (identifying public and private portions of certain state personnel records), 545 at 4 (1990) (attorney general has found kinds of financial information not excepted from public disclosure by common-law privacy to generally be those regarding receipt of governmental funds or debts owed to governmental entities), 523 at 4 (1989) (noting distinction under common-law privacy between confidential background financial information furnished to public body about individual and basic facts regarding particular financial transaction between individual and public body), 373 at 4 (1983) (determination of

whether public's interest in obtaining personal financial information is sufficient to justify its disclosure must be made on case-by-case basis).

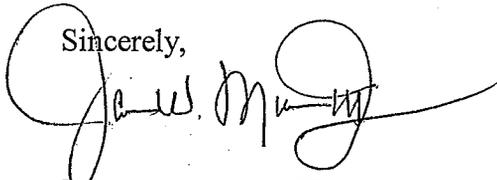
You have marked information in Exhibit D that the city seeks to withhold under common-law privacy.⁴ Having reviewed the information at issue, we conclude that the personal financial information we have marked is highly intimate or embarrassing and not a matter of legitimate public interest. The city must withhold that information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. We find that the remaining information you have marked is not intimate or embarrassing and a matter of no legitimate public interest. Therefore, that information is not protected by common-law privacy and may not be withheld on that basis under section 552.101.

In summary: (1) Exhibit C must generally be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code, but the records of disciplinary suspensions must be placed in the officer's civil service personnel file and released; and (2) the information we have marked in Exhibit D must be withheld under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy. The rest of the information in Exhibit D must be released.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



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

JWM/tp

⁴We note that some of the information in Exhibit D, which you have marked, does not pertain to the named officer and thus is not responsive to the instant request for information. This decision does not address the public availability of that information, which need not be released in response to the instant request.

Ref: ID# 386203

Enc: Submitted information

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)