



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 23, 2012

Ms. Janet I. Monteros
Assistant County Attorney
El Paso County
500 East San Antonio, Room 503
El Paso, Texas 79901

OR2012-16959

Dear Ms. Monteros:

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# 468609 (CA-OP 12-347).

The El Paso County Medical Examiner's Office (the "medical examiner's office") received a request for information pertaining to a specified autopsy report. You state the medical examiner's office has released some of the requested information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.111 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

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. Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by other statutes, including section 11 of article 49.25 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which provides as follows:

The medical examiner shall keep full and complete records properly indexed, giving the name if known of every person whose death is investigated, the place where the body was found, the date, the cause and manner of death, and shall issue a death certificate The records are subject to required public disclosure in accordance with [the Act], except that a photograph or x-ray of a body taken during an autopsy is excepted from required public disclosure in accordance with [the Act], but is subject to disclosure:

- (1) under a subpoena or authority of other law; or
- (2) if the photograph or x-ray is of the body of a person who died while in the custody of law enforcement.

Crim. Proc. Code art. 49.25, § 11. You state the submitted photographs of the deceased were taken during an autopsy. You represent neither of the statutory exceptions to confidentiality is applicable in this instance. Based on your representations and our review, we determine the medical examiner's office must withhold the submitted autopsy photographs under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 11 of article 49.25 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Section 552.111 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "[a]n interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency[.]" Gov't Code § 552.111. This exception encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of section 552.111 is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990).

In Open Records Decision No. 615, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* ORD 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995).

Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events that are severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *Arlington Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 37 S.W.3d 152 (Tex. App.—Austin 2001, no pet.); *see* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

This office has also concluded a preliminary draft of a document that is intended for public release in its final form necessarily represents the drafter's advice, opinion, and

recommendation with regard to the form and content of the final document, so as to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 559 at 2 (1990) (applying statutory predecessor). Section 552.111 protects factual information in the draft that also will be included in the final version of the document. *See id.* at 2-3. Thus, section 552.111 encompasses the entire contents, including comments, underlining, deletions, and proofreading marks, of a preliminary draft of a policymaking document that will be released to the public in its final form. *See id.* at 2.

You state the information you have marked under section 552.111 consists of an “unapproved” report, which will be made available to the public in its final form. However, upon review, we find the information at issue is general administrative and purely factual information that does not pertain to policymaking. Thus, we find you have failed to show how the information at issue consists of advice, opinions, or recommendations on the policymaking matters of the medical examiner’s office. Accordingly, the information at issue may not be withheld under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

You raise section 552.130 of the Government Code for portions of the remaining information. Section 552.130 excepts from disclosure information relating to a motor vehicle operator’s or driver’s license or permit issued by an agency of this state or another state or country. Gov’t Code § 552.130(a)(1). We note section 552.130 protects personal privacy. Accordingly, the requestor has a right of access to his client’s motor vehicle record information you have marked under section 552.023 of the Government Code and it may not be withheld under section 552.130. *See id.* § 552.023(a) (governmental body may not deny access to person to whom information relates or person’s agent on ground that information is considered confidential by privacy principles); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individuals request information concerning themselves). Accordingly, the medical examiner’s office may not withhold the information at issue from this requestor.

In summary, the medical examiner’s office must withhold the submitted autopsy photographs under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 11 of article 49.25 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The remaining information must be released.¹

¹As noted, the requestor has a right of access to his client’s motor vehicle record information being released. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.023(a). Section 552.130(c) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact information protected by section 552.130(a)(1) without the necessity of requesting a decision under the Act. *See id.* § 552.130(c). If a governmental body redacts such information, it must notify the requestor in accordance with section 552.130(e). *See id.* § 552.130(d), (e). Thus, if the medical examiner’s office receives another request for this same information from a person who does not have such a right of access, section 552.130(c) authorizes the medical examiner’s office to redact the driver’s license number of the requestor’s client.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia G. Tynan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Cynthia G. Tynan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CGT/akg

Ref: ID# 458609

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)