



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 2, 2013

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

OR2013-00006

Dear 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# 474843 (OIG Open Records 2012-00224).

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for the incident report relating to the death of a named inmate. You state you have released some of the requested information, including the custodial death report. You state you will redact certain information subject to section 552.117 of the Government Code pursuant to Open Records Letter No. 2005-01067 (2005) and section 552.147(b) of the Government Code.¹ You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, 552.107, 552.108, 552.130, and 552.134 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

¹We note section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact the social security number of a living person from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act. *See* Gov't Code § 552.147(b). We also note Open Records Letter No. 2005-01067 serves as a previous determination that the present and former home addresses and telephone numbers, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former employees of the department, regardless of whether the current or former employee complies with section 552.1175 of the Government Code, are excepted from disclosure under section 552.117(a)(3) of the Government Code.

Section 552.134(a) of the Government Code relates to inmates of the department and provides:

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 552.134 is explicitly made subject to section 552.029, which provides, in relevant part:

[n]otwithstanding [s]ection . . . 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). We find the submitted information pertains to the deceased inmate; therefore, we conclude section 552.134(a) is generally applicable to this information. We note, however, the submitted information pertains to the named inmate's death in custody. Therefore, the department must release basic information about the inmate's death pursuant to section 552.029(8). Basic information includes the time and place of the incident, names of inmates and department officials directly involved, a brief narrative of the incident, a brief description of any injuries sustained, and information regarding criminal charges or disciplinary actions filed as a result of the incident. Therefore, with the exception of basic information, the department must withhold the submitted information pursuant to section 552.134(a) of the Government Code.²

²As our ruling under section 552.134 of the Government Code is dispositive, we do not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information, except to note basic information under section 552.029(8) corresponds to basic front-page information under section 552.108(c) of the Government Code. See Gov't Code 552.108(c); *Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177, 186-88 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976); Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976). Further, this ruling does not affect an individual's right of access to a deceased patient's medical records from the physician who provided treatment under the Medical Practice Act (the "MPA"), subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code. See Occ. Code §§ 159.004-.006; see also *Abbott v. Tex. State Bd. of Pharmacy*, No. 03-11-00481-CV (Tex. App.—Austin Nov. 21, 2012), 2012 WL 5974080 (MPA does not provide patient general right of access to his or her medical records from governmental body responding to a request for information under the Public Information Act).

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, appearing to read "Sarah", followed by a circular stamp or mark and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Sarah Casterline
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SEC/tch

Ref: ID# 474843

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)