



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 1, 2013

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

OR2013-19084

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# 504459 (ORR-2013-00181).

The Office of the Inspector General of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for information regarding the investigation of a named inmate's death in custody. You state the department will release some of the requested information, including the submitted custodial death report. *See* Code Crim. Proc. art. 49.18(b). You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, 552.108, 552.117, 552.1175, 552.130, 552.134, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

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 a deceased inmate; therefore, we conclude section 552.134(a) is generally applicable to this information. We note, however, the information at issue 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, which you state is being released, the department must withhold the information at issue pursuant to section 552.134(a) of the Government Code.¹

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.

¹As 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 may generally not be withheld under section 552.108. *See* Open Records Decision No. 597 (1991); Gov't Code § 552.108(c). 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*, 391 S.W.3d 253 (Tex. App.— Austin 2012, no pet.) (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 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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Kristi L. Wilkins
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KLW/bhf

Ref: ID# 504459

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)