



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 20, 2016

Mr. Bryan Scott McWilliams
Assistant City Attorney
City of Amarillo
P.O. Box 1971
Amarillo, Texas 79105-1971

OR2016-01464

Dear Mr. McWilliams:

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# 597635 (PIR# 15-2274).

The Amarillo Police Department (the "department") received a request for all complaints of excessive force against the department for 2014, and all investigative materials associated with the resulting reports. You claim 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.

Initially, we note you have only submitted a summary of investigations by violation. Thus, to the extent any additional responsive information exists and was maintained by the department on the date the department received the request for information, we presume the department has released it. If not, the department must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to the requested information, it must release the information as soon as possible).

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from public 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 made confidential by other statutes, such as section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. You state the city is a civil service city under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. Section 143.089 provides for the maintenance of two different types of personnel files for each police officer

employed by a civil service city: one that must be maintained as part of the officer's civil service file and another the police department may maintain for its own internal use. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a), (g). Under section 143.089(a), 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 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. A letter of reprimand does not constitute discipline under chapter 143. *See* Attorney General Opinion JC-0257 (2000). 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).

Section 143.089(g) authorizes a 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. § 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

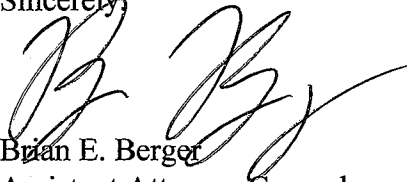
and the applicability of section 143.089(g) to that file. The records included in the departmental personnel file related to complaints against the police officer for which no disciplinary action was taken. The court determined section 143.089(g) made these records confidential. *See* 851 S.W.2d at 949; *see also City of San Antonio v. San Antonio Express-News*, 47 S.W.3d 556 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 2000, pet. denied) (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 (addressing functions of Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a) and (g) files).

You state the submitted information was gathered during an internal investigation that did not result in disciplinary action and is maintained in the department’s internal files pursuant to section 143.089(g). Based on your representations and our review, we conclude the department must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code.

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.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,



Brian E. Berger
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BB/akg

Ref: ID# 597635

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)