



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 1, 2017

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

OR2017-11982

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# 660099.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for information related to the death of a named inmate. The department states it will withhold information subject to section 552.117 of the Government Code as permitted by section 552.024(c) of the Government Code, will redact certain information pursuant to section 552.1175 of the Government Code, and will withhold social security numbers pursuant to section 552.147(b) of the Government Code.¹ You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, 552.108, 552.130, and 552.134 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

¹Section 552.117 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure the home addresses and telephone numbers, emergency contact information, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body. *See* Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(1). Section 552.024 of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to withhold information subject to section 552.117 without requesting a decision from this office if the current or former employee or official chooses not to allow public access to the information. *See id.* § 552.024(c). Section 552.1175(f) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact under section 552.1175(b), without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office, the home addresses and telephone numbers, emergency contact information, social security number, date of birth, and family member information of a peace officer as defined by article 2.12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure who properly elects to keep this information confidential. *See id.* § 552.1175(b), (f). Section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office. *See id.* § 552.147(b).

Initially, we note the submitted information includes a custodial death report. Article 49.18(b) of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that with the exception of any portion of the custodial death report the Office of the Attorney General (“OAG”) determines is privileged, the OAG shall make the report public. *See* Crim. Proc. Code art. 49.18(b). The format of the report was revised in May 2006 and now consists of four pages and an attached summary of how the death occurred. The OAG has determined the four-page report and summary must be released to the public but any other documents submitted with the revised report are confidential under article 49.18(b). Although you claim the submitted custodial death report is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.134 of the Government Code, the exceptions to disclosure found in the Act do not generally apply to information that other statutes make public. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 623 at 3 (1994), 525 at 3 (1989). Therefore, the department must release the submitted custodial death report pursuant to article 49.18(b) of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Section 552.134 of the Government Code is applicable to information related to inmates of the department. Section 552.134(a) states

[e]xcept 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 552.029 of the Government Code provides, in part,

[n]otwithstanding Section . . . 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). Thus, section 552.134 is explicitly made subject to section 552.029. Although the inmate to whom the remaining information pertains is deceased, section 552.134 is applicable to information that relates to the decedent as an inmate. Thus, we find section 552.134 is generally applicable to the remaining information. We note, however, the information in question is related to the death of an inmate in custody. Therefore, the department must release basic information about the inmate’s death pursuant to section 552.029. The basic information that must be released includes the time and place of the incident, the names of inmates and of department employees who were directly involved, a brief narrative of the incident, a brief description of any injuries sustained by

anyone involved, and information regarding any criminal charges or disciplinary actions that were filed as a result of the incident.² Accordingly, except for basic information subject to section 552.029(8) of the Government Code, the department must withhold the remaining information under section 552.134 of the Government Code.³

In summary, the department must release the submitted custodial death report pursuant to article 49.18(b) of the Code of Criminal Procedure. With the exception of the basic information subject to section 552.029(8) of the Government Code, which must be released, the department must withhold the remaining information under section 552.134 of the 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,



Ian Lancaster
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

IML/sb

Ref: ID# 660099

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

²We note basic information for section 552.134 purposes does not include the identities of witnesses.

³As we are able to reach these determinations, we need not address your other arguments against disclosure of this information.