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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 18, 2020

Ms. Katherine Tanner
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Criminal Justice
P.O. Box 4004
Huntsville, Texas 77342-4004

OR2020-31815

Dear Ms. Tanner:

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# 861772 (OGC# JN0117).

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to the death of a named inmate. You state you will release some information to the requestor. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.134 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

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

(a) 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 552.029 of the Government Code provides, in part:

Notwithstanding 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. You state the submitted information pertains to an inmate who was confined in a facility operated by the department. Upon review, we agree the submitted information is subject to section 552.134 of the Government Code. We note the submitted information pertains to the death of the named inmate. Thus, the department must release basic information about the 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 department employees who were 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. Accordingly, except for basic information under section 552.029(8) of the Government Code, which must be released, the department must withhold the submitted 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 <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

Kimbell Kesling
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KK/jxd

Ref: ID# 861772

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)