



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 7, 2022

Mr. Joe Zapata
Administrative Supervisor
Houston Police Department
1200 Travis, 10th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002-6000

OR2022-19474

Dear Mr. Zapata:

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# 957447 (ORR# P028412).

The Houston Police Department (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to specified internal affairs investigations.¹ The department claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.² We have considered the claimed exception and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code. The City of Houston is a civil service city under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. Section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code provides, in relevant part, the following:

¹ As the department has not submitted a copy of the request for information, we take our description from its brief.

² We note the department did not comply with the requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b), (e). Nevertheless, section 552.101 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness caused by a failure to comply with section 552.301.

(b) The department shall maintain an investigatory file that relates to a disciplinary action against a fire fighter or police officer that was overturned on appeal, or any document in the possession of the department that relates to a charge of misconduct against a fire fighter or police officer, regardless of whether the charge is sustained, only in a file created by the department for the department's use. The department may only release information in those investigatory files or documents relating to a charge of misconduct:

- (1) to another law enforcement agency or fire department;
- (2) to the office of a district or United States attorney; or
- (3) in accordance with Subsection (c).

(c) The department head or the department head's designee may forward a document that relates to disciplinary action against a fire fighter or police officer to the director or the director's designee for inclusion in the fire fighter's or police officer's personnel file maintained under Sections 143.089(a)-(f) only if:

- (1) disciplinary action was actually taken against the fire fighter or police officer;
- (2) the document shows the disciplinary action taken; and
- (3) the document includes at least a brief summary of the facts on which the disciplinary action was based.

Local Gov't Code § 143.1214(b)-(c). The department states the submitted information is maintained in its internal investigative files and relates to investigations by the department of alleged misconduct by department officers. The department also states the information at issue is maintained in its investigatory files and is not part of the officers' civil service personnel files. Further, the department states the requestor is not a representative from another law enforcement agency, a fire department, or the office of a district or United States attorney. *See id.* § 143.1214(b)(1)-(2). Based on these representations, we find the department must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.1214 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 <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,

James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/be

Ref: ID# 957447

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)