OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL · STATE OF TEXAS
JOHN CORNYN

September 7, 2001

Ms. Pamela Smith
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Public Safety
P. O. Box 4087
Austin, Texas 78773-0001

OR2001-3995

Dear Ms. Smith:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 153580.

The Texas Department of Public Safety (the "department") received a request for copies of driver's license photographs for two deceased individuals. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered your exception and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.130 provides in relevant part:

> (a) Information is excepted from the requirement of Section 552.021 if the information relates to:
>
> (1) a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state; [or]
>
> (2) a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state[.]

Section 552.130 is designed to protect the privacy interest of the individual. This office has determined that privacy rights lapse upon the death of the subject. Attorney General Opinion H-917 at 3-4 (1976); Open Records Decision No. 272 at 1 (1981). Therefore, section 552.130 of the Government Code does not except from disclosure the driver's license photographs of the deceased individuals. Accordingly, you must release the submitted information.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

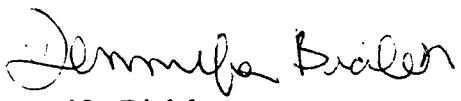
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Bialek
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JHB/sdk

Ref: ID# 153580

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Andy Shaw
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