



June 19, 2002

Mr. G. Chadwick Weaver
First Assistant City Attorney
City of Midland
P.O. Box 1152
Midland, Texas 79702-1152

OR2002-3323

Dear Mr. Weaver:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 166798.

The Midland Police Department (the "department") received a request for case number 0203020004. You indicate that you have released most of the front page information regarding this case. You claim, however, that portions of the requested information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You contend that some of the submitted information is excepted from public disclosure under section 552.130 of the Government Code. Section 552.130 excepts from public disclosure information relating to a driver's license or motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state. Accordingly, we have marked the information in the submitted documents that the department must withhold pursuant to section 552.130. We note, however, that 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). Here, the submitted information contains the driver's license number of a deceased individual. Therefore, the department must release this information to the requestor.

You also contend that the social security numbers contained in the submitted documents are confidential under the federal Social Security Act. Social security numbers may be withheld in some circumstances under section 552.101 of the Government Code. A social security number or "related record" may be excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 in conjunction with the 1990 amendments to the federal Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 405(c)(2)(C)(viii)(I). *See* Open Records Decision No. 622 (1994). These amendments

make confidential social security numbers and related records that are obtained and maintained by a state agency or political subdivision of the state pursuant to any provision of law enacted on or after October 1, 1990. *See id.* You cite section 411.086 of the Government Code. That provision contemplates rules that the Department of Public Safety (“DPS”) shall adopt in regard to requests for criminal history information. Section 411.086(b)(2) states that such rules “may require a person requesting criminal history information about an individual to submit to [DPS] one or more of the following: . . . (E) any known identifying number of the individual, including social security number”

While you state that the collection of social security numbers “by police officers helps establish identities of criminals,” you do not inform this office whether the department obtained or maintains any of the social security number information at issue in order to request criminal history information from DPS. Moreover, you do not inform us as to whether DPS actually requires or required the department to submit any of the social security number information at issue.

We conclude that the social security number information is confidential under section 552.101 in conjunction with the 1990 amendments to the federal Social Security Act if the department obtained or maintains the social security number information for the purpose of requesting criminal history information from DPS, and if DPS actually requires or required the department to submit that information to DPS in connection with a request for criminal history information.

To the extent the social security information was obtained or is maintained by the department solely under a policy or practice to identify individuals, we advise that such a policy or practice does not constitute a law enacted on or after October 1, 1990 authorizing the department to obtain or maintain a social security number. In that case, we have no basis for concluding that any of the social security numbers in the file are confidential under section 405(c)(2)(C)(viii)(I), and therefore excepted from public disclosure under section 552.101 on the basis of that federal provision. We caution, however, that section 552.352 of the Public Information Act imposes criminal penalties for the release of confidential information. Prior to releasing any social security number information, the department should ensure that no such information was obtained or is maintained pursuant to any provision of law enacted on or after October 1, 1990. We note, however, the submitted information contains the social security number of a deceased individual. The federal Social Security Act protects privacy interests. As privacy rights lapse upon death, the department may not withhold the social security number of the deceased individual contained in the submitted information. *See* Attorney General Opinion H-917 at 3-4 (1976); Open Records Decision No. 272 at 1 (1981).

To summarize: (1) we have marked the Texas driver’s license number that must be withheld under 552.130; (2) prior to releasing any social security number information, the department should ensure that no such information was obtained or is maintained pursuant to any

provision of law enacted on or after October 1, 1990; and (3) the department may not withhold the deceased individual's driver's license number or social security number. The remaining requested information must be released.

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 Texas Building and Procurement 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. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. 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,



Karen A. Eckerle
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KAE/sdk

Ref: ID# 166798

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Jim Warren
6344 Woodbury Avenue
Las Vegas, Nevada 89103
(w/o enclosures)