



August 22, 2002

Mr. Brett Bray  
Division Director  
Motor Vehicle Division  
Texas Department of Transportation  
P.O. Box 2293  
Austin, Texas 78768

OR2002-4668

Dear Mr. Bray:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 167681.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the “department”) received a request for “all document [sic] related to Signature Leasing . . . [including] copies of the license, correspondence, renewals, investigations, complaints, and any other document [sic].” You indicate that some responsive information has been released to the requestor. You state that you will redact certain motor vehicle record information and social security numbers in accordance with previous determinations of this office, but state that you do not wish to withhold any other information. *See* Open Records Letter Nos. 2001-6050 (2001); 2001-4775 (2001); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 673 at 7-8 (2001) (criteria of previous determination for information in specific, clearly delineated categories). You have, however, notified the third party, Signature Capital, LLC, d/b/a Signature Leasing, of the request for information and of the third party’s opportunity to submit comments to this office. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.305 (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to Gov’t Code § 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure in certain circumstances).

An interested third party is allowed 10 business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should be withheld from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, we have not received any correspondence from the third party. Thus, the third party has provided no basis for withholding the submitted information. *See, e.g.,* Gov't Code § 552.110(b); Open Records Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (to prevent disclosure of commercial or financial information, party must show by specific factual evidence, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that release of requested information would cause that party substantial competitive harm); Open Records Decision Nos. 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3 (1990).

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision. Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by other statutes. Section 552.101 also encompasses the common-law right to privacy. Information is protected under the common-law right to privacy when (1) the information contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) the information is not of legitimate concern to the public. *See Industrial Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976), *cert. denied*, 430 U.S. 931 (1977). Prior decisions of this office have found that personal financial information not relating to a financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body is protected by common-law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 600 (1992), 545 (1990). The submitted documents include a small amount of personal financial information which is protected from disclosure under common-law privacy. We have marked this information. The remainder of the submitted information is not afforded protection under common-law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision No. 620 (1993) (a corporation has no common-law privacy interest in its financial information).

You have noted that some of the materials at issue may be protected by copyright. A custodian of public records must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are copyrighted. Attorney General Opinion JM-672 (1987). A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.* If a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit. *See* Open Records Decision No. 550 (1990).

In summary, the department must withhold the motor vehicle record information and social security numbers for which it has been granted previous determinations. The department must withhold the marked personal financial information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy. The copyrighted material must be made available to the requestor, but the department must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies

of information that is copyrighted. The remainder of the submitted information must be released to the requestor.

Finally, you ask for a previous determination allowing the department to withhold from disclosure without seeking an open records ruling copyrighted information, leases, and ownership percentages. We decline to issue such a previous determination at this time.

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,



Cindy Nettles  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

CN/jh

Ref: ID# 167681

Enc. Submitted documents

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