



OFFICE of the ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

January 21, 2003

Mr. Doug Arnold
Assistant District Attorney
County of Williamson
405 M.L.K., No. 1
Georgetown, Texas 78626

OR2003-0397

Dear Mr. Arnold:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 175231.

The Williamson County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney") received a request for the police report related to cause number 00-324-K368. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we address the district attorney's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code. Pursuant to section 552.301(e), a governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records request (1) general written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, (2) a copy of the written request for information, (3) a signed statement or sufficient evidence showing the date the governmental body received the written request, and (4) a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. You did not provide this office with a copy of the written request for information.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to submit to this office the information required in section 552.301(e) results in the legal presumption that the information is public and must be released. Information that is presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information to overcome this presumption. *See Hancock v. State Bd.*

of *Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.--Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). Section 552.103 is a discretionary exception under the Public Information Act and does not demonstrate a compelling reason to withhold information from the public. See *Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469 (Tex. App. Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive section 552.103); see also Open Records Decision No. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions in general). Further, you have not demonstrated a compelling reason to withhold the information under section 552.108. *But see* Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991) (need of another governmental body to withhold information from disclosure provides compelling reason under section 552.108). Thus, the submitted information may not be withheld under sections 552.103 or 552.108 of the Government Code. Therefore, the submitted information must be released to the requestor.¹

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

¹We note that portions of the submitted document consist of confidential information that is not subject to release to the general public. See Gov't Code § 552.023. However, the requestor in this instance has a special right of access to the information. Gov't Code § 552.023. Because some of the information is confidential with respect to the general public, if the district attorney receives a further request for this information from an individual other than this requestor or his authorized representative, the district attorney should again seek our decision.

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# 175231

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Bryan Saterfield
1005 Collingsworth
Austin, Texas 78753
(w/o enclosures)