



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 6, 2006

Mr. Chad Morgan
Assistant County/District Attorney
Freestone County
118 East Commerce, Room 305
Fairfield, Texas 75840

OR2006-14337

Dear Mr. Morgan:

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# 266233.

The Freestone County Sheriff's Department (the "department") received a request for thirteen categories of information. You seek to withhold information responsive to items 3, 8, and 9 of the request.¹ You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the department's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code, which prescribes the procedures that a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Pursuant to section 552.301(e), a governmental body must submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records request a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. See Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(D). The department

¹To the extent any additional responsive information existed on the date the department received this request, we assume you have released it. If you have not released any such records, you must do so at this time. See Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302; see also Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible).

received the request for information on September 21, 2006, but did not submit the information at issue until October 13, 2006. Thus, the department failed to comply with the procedural requirements mandated by section 552.301.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless the governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302; *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 section 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). A compelling reason exists when third-party interests are at stake or when information is confidential under other law. Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977). Although the department raises section 552.108 of the Government Code, the department in this instance has not demonstrated a compelling interest under this exception that would allow the requested information to be withheld from disclosure. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 586 (1991) (governmental body may waive section 552.108), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver); *but see* Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991) (need of another governmental body to withhold requested information may provide compelling reason for nondisclosure under section 552.108 in certain circumstances). Accordingly, we conclude that the department may not withhold the requested information under section 552.108 of the Government Code. However, because section 552.101 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to withhold information, we will address your arguments under 552.101.

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. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. Chapter 772 of the Health and Safety Code authorizes the development of local emergency communications districts. Sections 772.118, 772.218, and 772.318 of the Health and Safety Code apply only to an emergency 9-1-1 district established in accordance with chapter 772. *See* Open Records Decision No. 649 (1996). These statutes make confidential the originating telephone numbers and addresses of 9-1-1 callers that are furnished by a service supplier. *Id.* at 2. Section 772.118 applies to emergency communication districts for counties with a population over two million. Section 772.218 applies to emergency communication districts for counties with a population over 860,000. Section 772.318 applies to emergency communication districts for counties with a population over 20,000. Subchapter E, which applies to counties with populations over 1.5 million, does not contain a confidentiality provision regarding 9-1-1 telephone numbers and addresses. *See* Health & Safety Code §§ 772.401, *et seq.* Thus, if the emergency communication district here is subject to section 772.118, 772.218, or 772.318, then the department must withhold the callers' originating addresses and phone numbers under section 552.101 to the extent this information was provided by a service supplier.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses common-law privacy. Common-law privacy protects information that is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, such that its release would be highly objectionable to a person of ordinary sensibilities, and (2) of no legitimate public interest. *See Industrial Foundation v. Texas Industrial Accident Board*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). Common-law privacy encompasses the specific types of information that the Texas Supreme Court held to be intimate or embarrassing in *Industrial Foundation*, including information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. *Id.* at 683. In addition, this office has found that some kinds of medical information or information indicating disabilities or specific illnesses are excepted from required public disclosure under common law privacy. *See Open Records Decision No. 455 (1987)* (prescription drugs, illnesses, operations, and physical handicaps). Therefore, the department must withhold the information we have marked pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

We note that section 552.117 of the Government Code may be applicable to some of the remaining information.² Section 552.117(a)(2) excepts from public disclosure the home address, home telephone number, and social security number of a peace officer, as well as information that reveals whether the peace officer has family members, regardless of whether the peace officer complies with sections 552.024 or 552.1175 of the Government Code. Section 552.117(a)(2) adopts the definition of peace officer found at article 2.12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Thus, if the submitted cellular telephone bills contain the home telephone numbers of peace officers, then the department must withhold this information under section 552.117(a)(2) of the Government Code.

We also note that the remaining submitted information contains account numbers. Section 552.136 of the Government Code states that “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential.” Gov’t Code § 552.136. The department must, therefore, withhold the type of account numbers we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code.

Finally, we note that a portion of the submitted information is 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

²The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exceptions of the Government Code on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).*

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, if the emergency communication district here is subject to section 772.118, 772.218, or 772.318 of the Health and Safety Code, then the department must withhold the callers' originating addresses and phone numbers under section 552.101 of the Government Code to the extent this information was provided by a service supplier. The department must also withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. If the submitted cellular telephone bills contain the home telephone numbers of peace officers, then the department must withhold this information under section 552.117(a)(2) of the Government Code. Finally, the department must withhold the type of account numbers we have marked pursuant to section 552.136 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released to the requestor. In releasing those portions of the submitted information that are protected by copyright, the department must comply with copyright law.

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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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 Dep't of Pub. 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 Office of the Attorney General 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,



Amy L.S. Shipp
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ALS/sdk

Ref: ID# 266233

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Rosemary Smith
Reporter
Freestone County Times
401 East Commerce Street
Fairfield, Texas 75840
(w/o enclosures)