



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 14, 2006

Ms. M. Ann Montgomery
Assistant County and District Attorney
Ellis County
1201 North Hwy 77, Suite 104
Waxahachie, Texas 75165-7832

OR2006-14678

Dear Ms. Montgomery:

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# 267681.

The Red Oak Police Department (the "department") received a request for information regarding a specified fatality accident. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure pursuant to sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we address the requestor's assertion that the department has failed to meet his procedural obligations under the Act. Specifically, the requestor indicates that he made two requests prior to the instant request for the information currently at issue and that the department failed to respond. The department contends it never received the previous requests. Whether the department received these previous requests is a question of fact. This office cannot resolve factual disputes in the opinion process. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 592 at 2 (1991), 552 at 4 (1990), 435 at 4 (1986). Where a fact issue cannot be resolved as a matter of law, we must rely on the facts alleged to us by the governmental body requesting our opinion, or upon those facts that are discernible from the documents submitted for our inspection. *See* Open Records Decision No. 552 at 4 (1990). Thus, as the

department asserts that the instant request is the first request it has received for this information, we will consider the department's arguments.

Next, we note that the submitted information includes CRB-3 accident report forms completed pursuant to chapter 550 of the Transportation Code. *See* Transp. Code § 550.064 (Texas Peace Officer's Accident Report form). Section 550.065(b) of the Transportation Code states that except as provided by subsection (c), accident reports are privileged and confidential. Section 550.065(c)(4) provides for the release of accident reports to a person who provides two of the following three pieces of information: (1) date of the accident; (2) name of any person involved in the accident; and (3) specific location of the accident. Transp. Code § 550.065(c)(4). Under this provision, the Department of Public Safety or another governmental body is required to release a copy of an accident report to a person who provides the governmental body with two or more pieces of information specified by the statute. *Id.* In the present request, the requestor has provided the required information. Accordingly, the department must release the accident reports pursuant to section 550.065(c).

Section 552.108 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. . . if . . . it is information that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime only in relation to an investigation that did not result in conviction or deferred adjudication.[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.108(a)(2). A governmental body that claims an exception to disclosure under section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why this exception is applicable to the information at issue. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A); *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that the submitted information relates to a closed investigation that did not result in a conviction or a deferred adjudication. Based on your representations, we conclude that the department may withhold the remaining submitted information pursuant to section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code.¹

In summary, the submitted accident report forms must be released to the requestor. However, the remaining submitted information may be withheld under section 552.108 of the Government Code.

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

¹As we are able to make this determination, we do not address your other claims under sections 552.108(b) and 552.101.

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,



Debbie K. Lee
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DKL/eb

Ref: ID# 267681

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. David E. Smith
AmeriClaim of Dallas
P. O. Box 852007
Richardson, Texas 75085-2007
(w/o enclosures)