



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

April 16, 2007

Mr. Robert L. Dillard, III
Nichols, Jackson, Dillard, Hager & Smith, L.L.P
1800 Lincoln Plaza
500 North Akard
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2007-04224

Dear Mr. Dillard:

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# 279542.

The University Park Police Department (the "department"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident and two named individuals. You inform us that the department has released some of the requested information, but claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.108 and 552.130 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. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply not later than the tenth business day after the date of receiving the written request. Gov't Code § 552.301(b). You state that the department received the instant request on March 6, 2007. Thus, the tenth business day after the department received the request was March 20, 2007. The envelope in which the department's request for a ruling was submitted bears a postmark date of March 21, 2007. *See id.* § 552.308 (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency mail). Consequently, the department did not request a ruling regarding the submitted information

within ten business days and, thus, failed to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 with regard to this 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). Generally, 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 you assert that the submitted information is excepted pursuant to section 552.108 of the Government Code, this is a discretionary exception that protects a governmental body's interests and may be waived by a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of the Act. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 522 at 4 (1989) (discretionary exceptions in general), 177 (1977) (governmental body may waive statutory predecessor to section 552.108). Thus, the department may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.108. *But see* Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991) (need of another governmental body to withhold information may provide compelling reason for nondisclosure under section 552.108). Because section 552.130 can provide a compelling reason to withhold information, we will address your arguments concerning this exception.

You claim that some of the submitted information is excepted from public disclosure under section 552.130 of the Government Code. In relevant part, section 552.130 provides:

(a) Information is excepted from required public disclosure if the information relates to:

- (1) a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state; [or]
- (2) a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state[.]

Gov't Code § 552.130(a)(2). We have marked the Texas motor vehicle record information that the department must withhold under section 552.130. The remaining submitted information must be released.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, 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.

¹ We note that the submitted information contains a social security number. Section 147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act.

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,



Paige Savoie
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PS/sdk

Ref: ID# 279542

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Chris Fulkerson
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