



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 3, 2007

Mr. Renaldo Stowers
Associate General Counsel
University of North Texas
P.O. Box 310907
Denton, Texas 76203-0907

OR2007-08474

Dear Mr. Stowers:

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# 282958.

The University of North Texas (the "university") received a request for all information pertaining to investigations, employment, and academic history of the requestor. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim.

Section 552.301 of the Government Code prescribes 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(b) of the Government Code, a governmental body must ask for the attorney general's decision and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days after receiving the request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Additionally, section 552.301(e) requires the governmental body to submit to this office, not later than the fifteenth business day after the date of its receipt of the request, (1) written comments stating why the governmental body's claimed exceptions apply to the information that it seeks to withhold; (2) a copy of the written request for information; (3) a signed statement of the date on which the governmental body received the request, or evidence sufficient to establish that date; and (4) the specific information that the governmental body seeks to withhold or representative samples if the information is voluminous. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A)-(D). If a governmental body fails to comply with section 552.301, the requested information is

presumed to be subject to required public disclosure and must be released, unless there is a compelling reason to withhold any of the information. *See id.* § 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ).

You state that the university received this request on April 12, 2007. However, you did not request a ruling until April 27, 2007. Furthermore, as of the date of this decision, this office has not received either any arguments in support of the university's claimed exceptions to disclosure or any of the information, or a representative sample of any information, that the university seeks to withhold. Therefore, because the university has not complied with section 552.301 in requesting this decision, the requested information is presumed to be public under section 552.302. This statutory presumption can generally be overcome when the information is confidential by law or third-party interests are at stake. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 630 at 3 (1994), 325 at 2 (1982).* Sections 552.107 and 552.108 are discretionary exceptions to disclosure that protect a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See Gov't Code § 552.007; Open Record Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions).* In failing to comply with section 552.301, the university has waived all of its discretionary exceptions and may not withhold any of the requested information under section 552.107 or 552.108 of the Government Code. Therefore, we have no choice but to order you to release the requested information.

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,



Jaime L. Flores
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLF/ma

Ref: ID# 282958

c: Mr. Jason Saller
c/o Mr. Renaldo Stowers
Associate General Counsel
University of North Texas
P.O. Box 310907
Denton, Texas 76203-0907
(w/o enclosures)