



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 22, 2014

Ms. Laura Pfefferle
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of State Health Services
P.O. Box 149347
Austin, Texas 78714-9347

OR2014-08834

Dear Ms. Pfefferle:

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# 527854 (DSHS File No. 22837/2014).

The Texas Department of State Health Services (the "department") received a request for Tier Two information reported by a named facility during specified years. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. You also state release of the submitted information may implicate the interests of a third party. Accordingly, you notified the third party of the request for information and of its right to submit arguments stating why its information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305 (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in certain circumstances). We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. You contend the submitted information is confidential under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 418.178 of the Government Code. Section 418.178 was added to chapter 418 of the Government Code as part of the Texas Homeland Security Act and provides as follows:

(a) In this section, “explosive weapon” has the meaning assigned by Section 46.01, Penal Code.

(b) Information is confidential if it is information collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental entity and:

(1) is more than likely to assist in the construction or assembly of an explosive weapon or a chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapon of mass destruction; or

(2) indicates the specific location of:

(A) a chemical, biological agent, toxin, or radioactive material that is more than likely to be used in the construction or assembly of such a weapon; or

(B) unpublished information relating to a potential vaccine or to a device that detects biological agents or toxins.

Id. § 418.178. The fact that information may generally relate to biological toxins does not make the information *per se* confidential under section 418.178. *See* Open Records Decision No. 649 at 3 (1996) (language of confidentiality provision controls scope of its protection). As with any confidentiality statute, a governmental body asserting section 418.178 must adequately explain how the responsive records fall within the scope of that provision. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.301(e)(1)(A) (governmental body must explain how claimed exception to disclosure applies). You argue the submitted information is confidential under section 418.178(b) because it reveals the location, quantity, and identity of hazardous chemicals that are more than likely to assist in the construction or assembly of an explosive weapon. Upon review, we find the submitted information is confidential under section 418.178 of the Government Code. Therefore, the department must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 418.178 of the Government Code.¹

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, or call the Office of the Attorney General’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.

providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan G. Holloway". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "M".

Megan G. Holloway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MGH/akg

Ref: ID# 527854

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party
(w/o enclosures)