



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 7, 2015

Ms. Angela Sessums
Warrants Manager
Wise County Sheriff's Office
200 Rook Ramsey Drive
Decatur, Texas 76234

OR2015-08956

Dear Ms. Sessums:

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# 563258.

The Wise County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information regarding a specified incident. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim.

Section 552.301 of the Government Code describes the procedural obligations placed on a governmental body that receives a written request for information it wishes to withhold. Pursuant to section 552.301(e) of the Government Code, a governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving the request (1) written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, (2) a copy of the written request for information, (3) a signed statement or sufficient evidence showing the date the governmental body received the written request, and (4) 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).*

You state the sheriff's office received the request for information on March 2, 2015. However, as of the date of this letter, you have not submitted for our review a copy or representative sample of the information requested. Consequently, we find the sheriff's office failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with section 552.301 results in the legal presumption the requested information is public and must be released unless a compelling reason exists to withhold the information

from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342, 350 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *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); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Generally, a compelling reason to withhold information exists where some other source of law makes the information confidential or where third party interests are at stake. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 630 at 3, 325 at 2 (1982).

Although you raise section 552.108 of the Government Code, this section is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See Simmons*, 166 S.W.3d at 350 (section 552.108 is not compelling reason to withhold information under section 552.302); Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions in general), 663 at 5 (1999) (untimely request for decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 at 3 (1997) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver). Thus, in failing to comply with section 552.301, the sheriff's office has waived its argument under section 552.108, and it may not withhold the requested information under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Therefore, the sheriff's office must release the requested information pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code.

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

Sincerely,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/dls

Ref: ID# 563258

c: Requestor