



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 18, 2015

Ms. Kristen Lee
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County Attorney's Office
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2015-09545

Dear Ms. Lee:

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# 564387 (C.A. File No. 15PIA0090).

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (the "institute") received a request for a specified autopsy report.¹ You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim.

We must address the institute's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code when requesting a decision from this office under the Act. Pursuant to section 552.301(e), a governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records request: (1) written comments stating the reasons why the claimed 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. Gov't Code § 552.301(e). You state the institute 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 of the request for information, written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply, or a copy or representative sample of the information requested. Accordingly, we find the institute failed to comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code.

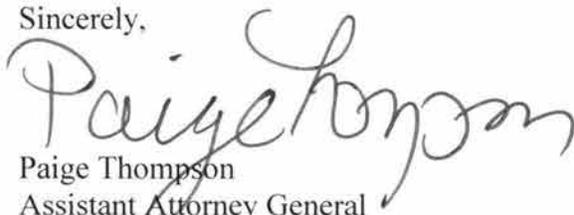
¹As you have not submitted a copy of the written request for information, we take our description from your brief.

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. Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977). Because the institute failed to comply with the procedural requirements of the Act, the institute has waived its claim under section 552.108 of the Government Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 177 (1977) (governmental body may waive statutory predecessor to section 552.108); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 663 at 5 (1999) (untimely request for decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions). Thus, we have no choice but to order the requested information released pursuant to section 552.302.

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,



Paige Thompson
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PT/dls

Ref: ID# 563487

c: Requestor