



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 1, 2015

Ms. Evelyn Kimeu
Staff Attorney
Houston Police Department
1200 Travis
Houston, Texas 77002-6000

OR2015-10714

Dear Ms. Kimeu:

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# 565486 (Houston OR No. 15-1531).

The Houston Police Department (the "department") received a request for twelve categories of information related to a specified motor vehicle accident. You state you will release information to the requestor. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the department's procedural obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code when requesting a decision from this office under the Act. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), within ten business days after receiving a written request the governmental body must request a ruling from this office and state the exceptions to disclosure that apply. Gov't Code § 552.301(b). The department received the request for information on March 6, 2015. We note this office does not count the date the request was received for the purpose of calculating a governmental body's deadlines under the Act. Thus, the department's ten-business-day deadline was March 20, 2015. However, the envelope in which you requested a ruling from this office bears a post meter mark of March 24, 2015. *See id.* § 552.308(a) (prescribing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency

mail). Accordingly, we find the department failed to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code 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. *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 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ); *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). Although the department seeks to withhold the submitted information under section 552.108 of the Government Code, section 552.108 is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interest and may be waived. *See* 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 (1977) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver). Thus, in failing to comply with section 552.301, the department has waived its argument under section 552.108 and may not withhold the submitted information on that basis. However, we note some of the submitted information is confidential under section 552.101 of the Government Code.¹ Section 552.101 can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness. Therefore, we will address the applicability of section 552.101 to the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as chapter 550 of the Transportation Code. Section 550.065 provides information that "relates to a motor vehicle accident reported under [chapter 550]" is privileged and for the confidential use of the Texas Department of Transportation or a local governmental agency of Texas that has use for the information for accident prevention purposes. Transp. Code § 550.065(a)-(b). Chapter 550 requires the creation of a written report when the accident resulted in injury to or the death of a person or damage to the property of any person to the apparent extent of \$1,000 or more. *Id.* §§ 550.061 (operator's accident report), .062 (officer's accident report). A governmental entity may release information related to a reported accident only in accordance with subsections (c) and (e). *Id.* § 550.065(c), (e). Section 550.065(c)(4) provides a governmental entity shall release such information to a person who provides two of the following three pieces of information: (1) the date of the

¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

accident, (2) the name of any person involved in the accident, and (3) the specific address or the highway or street where the accident occurred. *Id.* § 550.065(c)(4).

In *City of San Antonio v. Abbott*, the court of appeals considered the applicability of section 550.065 to certain information related to an accident. 432 S.W.3d 429 (Tex. App.—Austin 2014, pet. denied). The information at issue consisted of call-for-service and dispatch logs, and the requestor did not provide the requisite information pursuant to section 550.065(c)(4) to obtain the logs. The city argued the plain meaning of the phrase, “information that . . . relates to a motor vehicle accident” in section 550.065 includes *any* information pertaining to an accident reported under chapter 550, and thus, encompasses the information in its logs. Thus, the city contended the logs are confidential because the information relates to motor vehicle accidents reported under chapter 550. The court of appeals agreed with the city’s interpretation of section 550.065. The court held the phrase “relates to” is “very broad” and the Legislature’s use of the phrase “has the effect of broadening the scope of [s]ection 550.065 to render more than the actual accident reports confidential.” *Id.* at 432. Because the court found the language in section 550.065 to be unambiguous and encompass more than the actual accident report required to be filed under chapter 550, it concluded the city’s call-for-service and dispatch logs are confidential under section 550.065 of the Transportation Code. Relying on the court’s interpretation of the broad scope of section 550.065, we construe the converse to be true when the requestor does provide the requisite information pursuant to section 550.065(c)(4). Thus based on the court’s rationale, when a person provides two of the required pieces of information to a governmental entity, it must release any information that relates to a motor vehicle accident required to be reported under chapter 550. Such a release is not limited to the accident report itself. *Id.* at 433.

Here, the requested information relates to a motor vehicle accident required to be reported under chapter 550 because it resulted in injury to or the death of a person or damage to the property of a person to the apparent extent of \$1,000 or more, and the requestor has provided the department with the requisite information. Because the requestor has provided the department with the requisite information, the requestor has a statutory right of access under section 550.065(c)(4) of the Transportation Code.

We note, however, the submitted information contains information subject to section 411.083 of the Government Code. Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses chapter 411 of the Government Code, which makes confidential criminal history record information (“CHRI”) generated by the National Crime Information Center or by the Texas Crime Information Center. *See* Gov’t Code § 411.083(a). Title 28, part 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations governs the release of CHRI that states obtain from the federal government or other states. Open Records Decision No. 565 (1990). The federal regulations allow each state to follow its individual laws with respect to the CHRI it generates. *See id.* Section 411.083 of the Government Code deems confidential CHRI that the Department of Public Safety (“DPS”) maintains, except that DPS may disseminate this

information as provided in chapter 411, subchapter F of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 411.083. Sections 411.083(b)(1) and 411.089(a) authorize a criminal justice agency to obtain CHRI; however, a criminal justice agency may not release CHRI except to another criminal justice agency for a criminal justice purpose. *Id.* § 411.089(b)(1). Other entities specified in chapter 411 of the Government Code are entitled to obtain CHRI from DPS or another criminal justice agency; however, those entities may not release CHRI except as provided by chapter 411. *See generally id.* §§ 411.090-.127. Thus, any CHRI obtained from DPS or any other criminal justice agency must be withheld under section 552.101 in conjunction with chapter 411, subchapter F of the Government Code. Upon review, we find the information we marked consists of CHRI that is confidential pursuant to section 411.083 of the Government Code.

Because some of the submitted information is specifically protected from public disclosure by section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code, we find there is a conflict between this provision and the access provided under section 550.065(c)(4) of the Transportation Code. Where general and specific statutes are in irreconcilable conflict, the specific provision typically prevails as an exception to the general provision, unless the general provision was enacted later and there is clear evidence the legislature intended the general provision to prevail. *See id.* § 311.026(b); *see also City of Lake Dallas v. Lake Cities Mun. Util. Auth.*, 555 S.W.2d 163, 168 (Tex. Civ. App.—Fort Worth 1977, writ ref'd n.r.e.). Section 550.065(c)(4) provides a requestor with access to all information relating to a motor vehicle accident reported under chapter 550 when the requestor provides the requisite information. Transp. Code § 550.065(c)(4); *see City of San Antonio*, 432 S.W.3d at 432-433. However, section 411.083 of the Government Code specifically protects CHRI. Thus, we find the confidentiality provided by section 411.083 of the Government Code prevails over the statutory access under section 550.065(c)(4) of the Government Code. Accordingly, the department must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code.

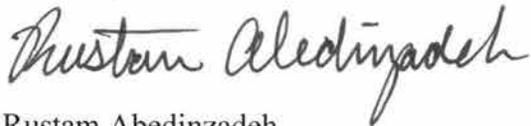
In summary, the department must withhold the information we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code. The department must release the remaining information.²

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.

²Because the requestor has a special right of access to the information being released, if the department received another request for this information from an individual without such a right of access, the department must again seek a ruling from this office. *See* Transp. Code § 550.065(c)(4).

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rustam Abedinzadeh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Rustam Abedinzadeh
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RA/dls

Ref: ID# 565486

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)