



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 10, 2015

Mr. M. Matthew Ribitzki
Deputy City Attorney
City of Burleson
141 West Renfro
Burleson, Texas 76028

OR2015-11302

Dear Mr. Ribitzki:

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# 566648.

The City of Burleson (the "city") received a request for accident report number 15-000581. You state you will release some information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed 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. Section 552.101 encompasses information subject to 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.

¹Although you raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 552.108 of the Government Code, this office has concluded section 552.101 does not encompass other exceptions found in the Act. See Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 1-2 (2002), 575 at 2 (1990).

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 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(b) 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.

In this instance, the submitted information relates to a report of 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. We note the requestor has provided the city with the requisite information for release of this report. Although the city asserts the submitted information is subject to section 552.108 of the Government Code, as a general rule, statutes governing the release of specific information prevail over the general exceptions to disclosure found in the Act. *See* Attorney General Opinion DM-146 at 3 (1992); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exceptions to disclosure under the Act). Because section 552.108 is a general exception under the Act, the requestor’s statutory access under section 550.065(c)(4) prevails and the city may not withhold the

information under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Thus, the city must release all of the information in report number 15-000581 to the requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c).

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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katelyn Blackburn-Rader".

Katelyn Blackburn-Rader
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KB-R/akg

Ref: ID# 566648

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)