



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 21, 2015

Ms. Barbara J. Fox
Assistant County Attorney
Chambers County
P. O. Box 1200
Anahuac, Texas 77514

OR2015-17383

Dear Ms. Fox:

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# 577119.

Chambers County (the "county") received a request for records relating to a specified autopsy report.¹ You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. We have considered your arguments.

Initially, we address the county's procedural obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code. 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) general 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. Gov't Code § 552.301(e). As of the date of this letter, you have not submitted arguments explaining why the stated exception applies, a copy of the request for information, or a copy or representative sample of the specific information requested. Consequently, we find the county failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301(e) of the Government Code.

¹ As you have not submitted the 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 submit to this office the information required in section 552.301(e) results in the legal presumption that the information is public and must be released. *Id.* § 552.302. Information that is presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information to overcome this presumption. *Id.*; *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 Gov't Code § 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). Normally, a compelling reason exists when third-party interests are at stake or when information is confidential under the Act or other law. Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977). Because the county has failed to comply with the requirements of the Act, the county has waived all of its claimed discretionary exceptions to disclosure. *See* Open Records Decision No. 663 at 5 (1999) (untimely request for decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions). Furthermore, because you have not submitted a copy or representative sample of the specific information requested to this office for our review, we have no basis for finding it confidential under the claimed mandatory exceptions. Thus, we have no choice but to order the county to release the requested information pursuant to section 552.302. If the county believes the information is confidential and may not lawfully be released, it must challenge this ruling in court pursuant to section 552.324 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,



Ashley Crutchfield
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

AC/eb

Ref: ID# 577119

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)