



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 9, 2015

Ms. Leslie O. Haby
Assistant Criminal District Attorney
Civil Section
County of Bexar
101 West Nueva Street, 7th Floor
San Antonio, Texas 78205

OR2015-23477

Dear Ms. Haby:

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# 588589 (BCDA File #4206).

The Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office (the "medical examiner's office") received a request for the autopsy and toxicology report regarding a named decedent. You claim the requested information is exempted from disclosure under sections 552.101 through 552.154 of the Government Code. We have considered your claims.

We must address the obligations of the medical examiner's office under the Act. Section 552.301 of the Government Code describes the 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, the governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving the 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. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e). You state the medical examiner's office received the request for information on September 3, 2015. However, as of the date of this letter, the medical examiner's office has not submitted for our review written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply or a copy or representative sample of the information requested. Consequently, we find the medical examiner'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 the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless there is a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342 (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); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Because the medical examiner's office failed to comply with the requirements of the Act, the medical examiner's office has waived all of its claimed discretionary exceptions to disclosure. *See* Open Records Decision No. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (untimely request for decision results in waiver of discretionary exceptions). Although the medical examiner's office also raises mandatory exceptions to disclosure, because you have not submitted the requested information for our review, we have no basis for finding any of the information excepted from disclosure or confidential by law. Thus, we have no choice but to order the requested information released pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code. If you believe the information is confidential and may not be lawfully released, you 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,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/dls

Ref: ID# 588589

c: Requestor