



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 9, 2016

Ms. D. Kaylyn Betts
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Public Safety
P.O. Box 4087
Austin, Texas 78773-0001

OR2016-10532

Dear Ms. Betts:

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# 615515 (DPS PIR# 16-1907).

The Texas Department of Public Safety (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You state the department has released some of the requested information. 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 representative sample of information.¹

Initially, we must address the department's procedural obligations under the Act. Section 552.301 describes the procedural obligations placed on a governmental body that receives a written request for information it wishes to withhold. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), the governmental body must ask for the attorney general's decision and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days after receiving the request. *See Gov't Code* § 552.301(b). In this instance, you state the department received the request for information on April 4, 2016. Accordingly, the department's ten-business-day deadline was

¹We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

April 18, 2016. However, you did not request a ruling until April 19, 2016. *See id.* § 552.308 (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency mail). Consequently, we find the department failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 in requesting this decision from our office.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the information is public. Information that is presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information to overcome this presumption. *See 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); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). A compelling reason exists when third-party interests are at stake, or when information is confidential by law. Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977). Section 552.108 is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests and generally is not a compelling reason to withhold information. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 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). In failing to comply with section 552.301, the department has waived its claim under section 552.108. However, we note some of the submitted information may be subject to section 552.101, 552.130, and 552.137 of the Government Code.² Because sections 552.101, 552.130, and 552.137 can provide compelling reasons to withhold information, we will consider the applicability of these exceptions 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. Section 552.101 encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). Under the common-law right of privacy, an individual has a right to be free from the publicizing of private affairs in which the public has no legitimate concern. *Id.* at 682. In considering whether a public citizen's date of birth is private, the Third Court of Appeals looked to the supreme court's rationale in *Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts v. Attorney General of Texas*, 354 S.W.3d 336 (Tex. 2010). *Paxton v. City of Dallas*, No. 03-13-00546-CV, 2015 WL 3394061, at *3 (Tex. App.—Austin May 22, 2015, pet. denied) (mem. op.). The supreme court concluded public employees' dates of birth are private under section 552.102 of the Government Code because the employees' privacy interest substantially outweighed

²The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

the negligible public interest in disclosure.³ *Texas Comptroller*, 354 S.W.3d at 347-48. Based on *Texas Comptroller*, the court of appeals concluded the privacy rights of public employees apply equally to public citizens, and thus, public citizens' dates of birth are also protected by common-law privacy pursuant to section 552.101. *City of Dallas*, 2015 WL 3394061, at *3. We note "the right of privacy is purely personal," that right "terminates upon the death of the person whose privacy is invaded." *Moore v. Charles B. Pierce Film Enters., Inc.*, 589 S.W.2d 489, 491 (Tex. Civ. App.—Texarkana 1979, writ ref'd n.r.e.); see also *Justice v. Belo Broadcasting Corp.*, 472 F. Supp. 145, 147 (N.D. Tex. 1979) ("action for invasion of privacy can be maintained only by a living individual whose privacy is invaded" (quoting RESTATEMENT (SECOND) OF TORTS § 652I (1977))); Attorney General Opinions JM-229 (1984) ("the right of privacy lapses upon death"), H-917 (1976) ("We are . . . of the opinion that the Texas courts would follow the almost uniform rule of other jurisdictions that the right of privacy lapses upon death."); Open Records Decision No. 272 (1981) ("the right of privacy is personal and lapses upon death"). Thus, the department may not withhold information pertaining solely to the deceased individual under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. We also note the information at issue includes the requestor's client's date of birth. The requestor has a right of access to this information. See Gov't Code § 552.023 (person or person's authorized representative has special right of access to records that contain information relating to the person that are protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect that person's privacy interests); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individual requests information concerning himself). Thus, the department must withhold the date of birth we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information that relates to a motor vehicle operator's license or driver's license or a motor vehicle title or registration issued by a Texas agency, or an agency of another state or country. See Gov't Code § 552.130(a)(1)-(2). We note section 552.130 is designed to protect the privacy of individuals, and the right to privacy expires at death. See *Moore*, 589 S.W.2d at 491; ORD 272 at 1. Thus, the department may not withhold information that pertains solely to a deceased individual under section 552.130. Upon review, we find the department must withhold the motor vehicle record information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

Section 552.137 excepts from disclosure "an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body," unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c). See Gov't Code § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail address at issue is not a type specifically excluded by section 552.137(c). Accordingly, the

³Section 552.102(a) excepts from disclosure "information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy." Gov't Code § 552.102(a).

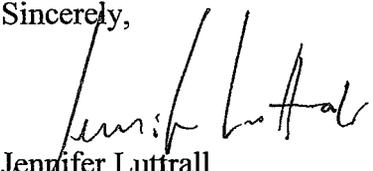
department must withhold the e-mail address we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner of the e-mail address affirmatively consents to its disclosure.

In summary, the department must withhold the date of birth we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The department must withhold the motor vehicle record information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The department must withhold the e-mail address we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner of the e-mail address affirmatively consents to its disclosure. The remaining information must be released.

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,



Jennifer Luttrall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JL/akg

Ref: ID# 615515

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)