



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 14, 2016

Mr. Robert W. Patterson
Open Records Coordinator
Texas Health and Human Services Commission
P.O. Box 13247
Austin, Texas 78711

OR2016-15973

Dear Mr. Patterson:

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# 618518.

The Health and Human Services Commission (the "commission") received a request for eight categories of information within a specified period of time. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 through 552.154 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim.

Initially, we note the commission seeks to withdraw its request for an open records decision because it asserts the request for information was withdrawn by operation of law when the requestor failed to timely respond to a cost estimate for providing the requested records. Upon review of a copy of the cost estimate, we find it does not comply with the requirements of section 552.2615(a) of the Government Code. Gov't Code § 552.2615(a). Accordingly, we conclude the request for information was not withdrawn by operation of law. *See id.* § 552.2615(b).

We must address the commission's procedural obligations under the Act. Pursuant to section 552.301(e) of the Government Code, a governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving the request (1) 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 inform us that the commission received this request on April 25, 2016. However, as of the date of this letter, you have not submitted to this office comments explaining why the stated exceptions apply or a copy or representative sample of the information requested. Consequently, we find that the commission failed to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301.

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 the requested information is public and must be released unless a compelling reason exists to withhold the information from disclosure. *See 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, 381-82 (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); *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). Because the commission has failed to comply with the procedural requirements of the Act, the commission has waived its discretionary exceptions to disclosure. *See* Open Records Decision No. 663 at 5 (1999) (untimely request for decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions). Although the commission 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. If you believe the information is confidential and may not lawfully be 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kavid Singh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K' and 'S'.

Kavid Singh
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KVS/bhf

Ref: ID# 618518

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)