



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

February 19, 2003

Lt. Javier Gonzalez
Pharr Police Department
202 East Clark
Pharr, Texas 78577

OR2003-1082

Dear Lt. Gonzalez:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 176748.

The Pharr Police Department (the "department") received a request for information concerning a particular offense report.¹ You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the department has failed to comply with the requirements of 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. You did not, however, submit to this office a copy of the written request for information.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless the governmental body demonstrates a compelling

¹As you have not submitted the written request for information, we infer its contents based on the information you have submitted.

reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302; *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 interest 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).

In this instance, you assert that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Section 552.108 is a discretionary exception and, under the present circumstances, does not provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption that the information at issue is public. *See* Open Records Decision No. 177 (1977) (governmental body may waive statutory predecessor to section 552.108); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 522 at 4 (1989) (discretionary exceptions are intended to protect only interests of governmental body as distinct from exceptions intended to protect information deemed confidential by law or interests of third parties); *cf.* Open Records Decision 586 (1991) (deciding that need of another governmental body to withhold requested information may provide compelling reason for nondisclosure under section 552.108). Therefore, none of the submitted information may be withheld on the basis of section 552.108. We note, however, that portions of the submitted records may be excepted under section 552.101, 552.130, and 552.136, and we will address those exceptions.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” This section encompasses information made confidential by other statutes. The 1990 amendments to the federal Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 405(c)(2)(C)(viii)(I), make confidential social security numbers and related records that are obtained and maintained by a state agency or political subdivision of the state pursuant to any provision of law enacted on or after October 1, 1990. *See* Open Records Decision No. 622 (1994). In this instance, we have no basis for concluding that the social security numbers are confidential under section 405(c)(2)(C)(viii)(I) and therefore excepted from public disclosure under section 552.101 on the basis of that federal provision. We caution, however, that section 552.352 of the Public Information Act imposes criminal penalties for the release of confidential information. Prior to releasing any social security numbers, the department should ensure that it did not obtain or maintain them pursuant to any provision of law enacted on or after October 1, 1990.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information relating to “a motor vehicle operator’s or driver’s license or permit issued by an agency of this state.” We have marked the information that the department must withhold pursuant to section 552.130, if the driver’s license was issued by an agency of this state.

Section 552.136 of the Government Code states that “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is

collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential.” Gov’t Code § 552.136. Pursuant to this exception, the department must withhold the account number we have marked.

In summary, social security numbers must be released unless obtained or maintained pursuant to a law enacted on or after October 1, 1990. The driver’s license number we have marked must be withheld in accordance with section 552.130 if the license was issued by an agency of this state. Under section 552.136, the department must withhold the bank account number we have marked. All other submitted information must be released.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

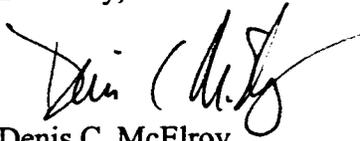
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body’s intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Denis C. McElroy
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DCM/lmt

Ref: ID# 176748

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. John Arlis Tagle
Lt. Javier Gonzalez
c/o Pharr Police Department
202 E. Clark
Pharr, Texas 78577
(w/o enclosures)