ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 3, 2004

Mr. Brett Bray
Division Director
Texas Department of Transportation
P. O. Box 2293
Austin, Texas 78768

OR2004-6528

Dear Mr. Bray:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 206991.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for the Ownership and Management Information and signature pages from West Auto Sales' application. You state that you have released some information to the requestor and that you will withhold certain motor vehicle record information and social security numbers in accordance with previous determinations issued by this office. *See* Open Records Letter Nos. (2001) (criteria of previous determination for information in specific, clearly delineated categories). You claim that the licensees' ownership percentages are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. Pursuant to section 552.305 of the Government Code, you notified the licensees of the request. We have considered the department's claimed exception and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section encompasses the doctrine of common law privacy, which protects information if it (1) contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person and (2) is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.,* 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). This office has found that personal financial information not relating to the financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body is protected by common law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision

Nos. 600 (1992), 545 (1990). We agree that the department must withhold the licensees' ownership percentages under section 552.101 in conjunction with common law privacy.

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).

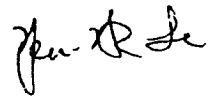
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

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,



Yen-Ha Le
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

YHL/krl

Ref: ID# 206991

Enc. Submitted document

c: Ms. Gevonna Fassett
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(w/o enclosures)