



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 23, 2005

Ms. Teresa R. Navarro
Elections Administrator
Hidalgo County Elections Department
P.O. Box 659
Edinburg, Texas 78540

OR2005-05589

Dear Ms. Navarro:

You have asked whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 230406.

The Elections Department of Hidalgo County (the "department") received a request for records relating to complaints about the City of McAllen's 2005 elections. The department seeks to withhold the information.

The department did not seek an open records decision from this office within the statutory ten-day deadline. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Furthermore, the department did not submit the requisite information within the statutory fifteen-day deadline. *Id.* § 552.301(e). The department's delay in this matter results in the presumption that the requested information is public. *See id.* § 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ). In order to overcome the presumption that the requested information is public, a governmental body must provide compelling reasons why the information should not be disclosed. *Hancock*, 797 S.W.2d at 381. The need of a governmental body, other than the agency that is seeking an open records decision, to withhold information under section 552.108 of the Government Code may be a compelling reason for non-disclosure. Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991). Section 552.108 excepts from disclosure:

- (a) Information held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if:

(1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]

Gov't Code § 552.108(a). In this instance, the Hidalgo County District Attorney's Office has advised that the disclosure of the requested information would interfere with the prosecution of a pending criminal case. Therefore, the department may withhold the requested information pursuant to section 552.108(a)(1).

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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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 of 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yen-Ha Le', written in a cursive style.

Yen-Ha Le
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

YHL/sdk

Ref: ID# 230406

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Marc B. Geller
Reporter
The Monitor
1400 East Nolana Loop
McAllen, Texas 78504
(w/o enclosures)