



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 24, 2008

Mr. Jefferson Bray
Senior Legal Advisor
Plano Police Department
P.O. Box 860358
Plano, Texas 75083-0358

OR2008-10557A

Dear Mr. Bray:

This office issued Open Records Letter No. 2008-10557 (2008) on August 5, 2008. We have examined this ruling and determined that an error was made in its issuance. Where this office determines that an error was made in the decision process under sections 552.301 and 552.306 of the Government Code, and that error resulted in an incorrect decision, we will correct the previously issued ruling. Consequently, this decision serves as the corrected ruling and is a substitute for the decision issued on August 5, 2008. *See generally* Gov't Code § 552.011 (providing that Office of Attorney General may issue decision to maintain uniformity in application, operation, and interpretation of Public Information Act ("Act")). Your request was assigned ID# 326718.

The City of Plano (the "city") received a request for the names and addresses of registered vehicle owners who were sent complaint letters concerning being observed committing a traffic violation. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the requestor only requested the names and addresses of registered vehicle owners who were sent complaint letters concerning being observed committing a traffic violation. Because the names and addresses are the only information requested, the majority of the information you have submitted is not responsive and need not be released in response to this request. Furthermore, because the requestor is not seeking Texas motor vehicle record information, we do not address your argument under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

Next, we address your claim under section 552.101 of the Government Code, which excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." *Id.* § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses section 730.004 of the Transportation Code, which provides that "[n]otwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, including chapter 552, Government Code, except as

provided by Sections 730.005 -730.007, an agency may not disclose personal information about any person obtained by the agency in connection with a motor vehicle record.” Transp. Code § 730.004; *see also id.* § 730.003(4) (defining motor vehicle record to include a record that pertains to a motor vehicle operator’s or driver’s license or permit, motor vehicle registration, motor vehicle title, or identification document issued by an agency of this state). Section 552.101 also encompasses section 730.013, which provides that for purposes of chapter 730 of the Transportation Code:

(a) An authorized recipient of personal information may not resell or redisclose the personal information in the identical or a substantially identical format the personal information [sic] was disclosed to the recipient by the applicable agency.

(b) An authorized recipient of personal information may resell or redisclose the information only for a use permitted under Section 730.007.

(c) Any authorized recipient who resells or rediscloses personal information obtained from an agency shall be required by that agency to:

(1) maintain for a period of not less than five years records as to any person or entity receiving that information and the permitted use for which it was obtained; and

(2) provide copies of those records to the agency on request.

(d) A person commits an offense if the person violates this section. An offense under this subsection is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine not to exceed \$25,000.

Transp. Code § 730.013. You state that the city obtains license plate numbers from citizens who witness traffic offenses. You indicate that the city then uses the license plate numbers to obtain additional motor vehicle record information from the Texas Department of Transportation (“TxDOT”). We note that TxDOT is an agency under section 730.003(1) that obtains or compiles motor vehicle records. We further note that the names and addresses of the owners of Texas registered vehicles obtained by the city from TxDOT are considered personal information under section 730.003(6). *See id.* §730.003(6) (personal information means information that identifies a person, including an individual’s photograph or computerized image, social security number, driver identification number, name, address, but not the zip code, telephone number, and medical or disability information). Accordingly, we find that, by obtaining motor vehicle information from TxDOT to assist the city in carrying out its functions, the city is an authorized recipient of personal information for purposes of section 730.013. *See id.* § 730.007(a)(2)(A)(i).

Based upon your representations and our review of the information at issue, we conclude that, because the names and addresses of owners of Texas registered vehicles were obtained

from TxDOT by an authorized recipient, and because this information is in the identical or substantially identical format that it was received by the city from TxDOT, the names and addresses of owners of Texas registered vehicles are confidential under section 730.013(a) of the Transportation Code. Accordingly, as we have no indication that release of this information would be for a use permitted under section 730.007, we conclude that the owners' names and addresses must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

However, we note that section 730.013 makes confidential only the names of individuals whose vehicles are registered in Texas. The submitted zip codes and the name of the owner of a vehicle registered in a state other than Texas, do not consist of personal information for the purposes of section 730.003(6). Therefore, this information may not be withheld under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 730.013(a).

However, we note that section 552.101 also encompasses federal law, including section 2721 of title 18 of the United States Code, which prohibits the release and use of certain personal information from state motor vehicle records. Section 2721 provides in pertinent part:

(a) In general.—A State department of motor vehicles, and any officer, employee, or contractor thereof, shall not knowingly disclose or otherwise make available to any person or entity:

(1) personal information, as defined in 18 U.S.C. 2725(3), about any individual obtained by the department in connection with a motor vehicle record, except as provided in subsection (b) of this section; or

(2) highly restricted personal information, as defined in 18 U.S.C. 2725(4), about any individual obtained by the department in connection with a motor vehicle record, without the express consent of the person to whom such information applies, except uses permitted in subsections (b)(1), (b)(4), (b)(6), and (b)(9)[.]

...

(c) Resale or redisclosure.—An authorized recipient of personal information (except a recipient under subsection (b)(11) or (12)) may resell or redisclose the information only for a use permitted under subsection (b) (but not for uses under subsection (b)(11) or (12)). . . . Any authorized recipient (except a recipient under subsection (b)(11)) that resells or rediscloses personal information covered by this chapter must keep for a period of 5 years records identifying each person or entity that receives information and the permitted purpose for which the information will be used and must make such records available to the motor vehicle department upon request.

See 18 U.S.C. § 2721(a), (c). We note that some of the remaining responsive information, consisting of the name and address of the owner of a vehicle registered in a state other than Texas, is considered personal information for purposes of section 2725(3). *See id.* § 2725(3) (personal information means information that identifies a person, including the person's name and address). As previously stated, we understand that the city uses the license plate numbers obtained from citizens who witness traffic violations to procure additional motor vehicle record information from either TxDOT or the equivalent agency in another state. Thus, we conclude that, by obtaining motor vehicle information from other state agencies to assist the city in carrying out its functions, the city is an authorized recipient of personal information for purposes of section 2721(c). *See id.* § 2721(b)(1) (personal information may be disclosed by a state department of motor vehicles to any government agency). Therefore, because this information was obtained from a state department of motor vehicles by an authorized recipient, this information is confidential under federal law. As we have no indication that release of this information would be for a use permitted under section 2721(b), we conclude that with the exception of zip code, the name and address of the owner of a vehicle registered in a state other than Texas must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 2721(c) of title 18 of the United States Code.

In summary, you must release the submitted zip codes. You must withhold the remaining responsive information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 730.004 of the Transportation Code and section 2721 of title 18 of the United States Code.

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 file suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3). If the governmental body does not file suit over 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 challenge 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 Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,



Amy L.S. Shipp
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ALS/jb

Ref: ID# 326718

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Steve Stoler
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(w/o enclosures)