



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 18, 2008

Ms. Cecilia Gamez
Crime Records Bureau
McAllen Police Department
P.O. Box 220
McAllen, Texas 78501

OR2008-11247

Dear Ms. Gamez:

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# 323836.

The McAllen Police Department (the "department") received a request for information relating to an alleged theft of a vehicle. 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 have reviewed the information you submitted.

Initially, we must address the department's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code. Section 552.301 prescribes procedures that a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(a). Section 552.301(b) requires the governmental body to ask for the attorney general's decision and claim its exceptions to disclosure not later than the tenth business day after the date of its receipt of the written request for information. *See id.* § 552.301(b). If a governmental body fails to comply with section 552.301, the requested information is presumed to be subject to required public disclosure and must be released, unless there is a compelling reason to withhold any of the information. *See id.* § 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. App. – Austin 1990, no writ).

In this instance, the department's ten-business-day deadline under section 552.301(b) was July 21, 2008. The department requested this decision by U.S. Mail meter-marked

July 30, 2008. Therefore, because the department did not comply with section 552.301 in requesting this decision, the submitted information is presumed to be public under section 552.302. This statutory presumption can generally be overcome when information is confidential by law or third-party interests are at stake. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 630 at 3 (1994), 325 at 2 (1982). Section 552.108 of the Government Code, which you raise, is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See* Gov't Code § 552.007; Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.108 subject to waiver). The department's claim under section 552.108 is not a compelling reason for non-disclosure under section 552.302. In failing to comply with section 552.301, the department has waived section 552.108 and may not withhold any of the submitted information under that exception. As the department claims no other exception to disclosure, all of the submitted information must be released.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 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

¹We note that the submitted documents contain information that the department would be required to withhold from the public to protect the privacy of the individual to whom the information pertains. In this instance, however, the requestor is an attorney for that individual. As such, the requestor has a special right of access to his client's private information under section 552.023 of the Government Code. Therefore, the client's information may not be withheld from this requestor on privacy grounds. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(a); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individual requests information concerning herself). Should the department receive another request for these same records from a person who would not have a right of access to the client's private information, the department should resubmit these records and request another decision. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302.

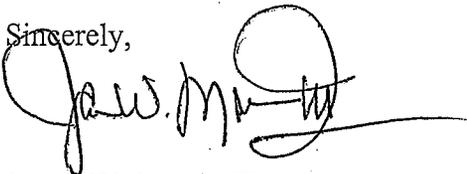
Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor 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,



James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/jh

Ref: ID# 323836

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Isaac J. Tawil
Garcia, Quintanilla & Palacios
5526 North 10th Street
McAllen, Texas 78504-2713
(w/o enclosures)