



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 10, 2008

Ms. M. Ann Montgomery
Assistant Ellis County & District Attorney
Ellis County
1201 North Highway 77, Suite 104
Waxahachie, Texas 75165-7832

OR2008-13951

Dear Ms. Montgomery:

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# 324532.

The Ellis County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney") received a request for information pertaining to a specified case. You state that you have released a portion of the responsive information to the requestor. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the district attorney's obligations under the Act. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body that receives a request for information that it wishes to withhold must ask for the attorney general's decision and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days after receiving the request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(a), (b). You state the district attorney received the request for information on July 21, 2008. However, you did not request a ruling from this office until August 5, 2008. Consequently, we find that the district attorney failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 in requesting this decision.

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. Information that is presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information from

disclosure. *See 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). Generally, a governmental body may demonstrate a compelling reason to withhold information by a showing that the information is made confidential by another source of law or affects third party interests. *See* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Although you raise sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code, these sections are discretionary exceptions that protect a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469,475-76 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive section 552.103); Open Records Decision Nos. 663 at 5 (1999) (untimely request for decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 (1977) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver). Therefore, the district attorney may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.103 or section 552.108 of the Government Code. However, we note that section 552.136 is applicable to a portion of the submitted information.¹ Because section 552.136 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness, we will address this exception.

Section 552.136 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(b). The district attorney must withhold the bank account and routing numbers we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code. As you raise no other exception to disclosure of the remaining information, it must be released to the requestor.²

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

¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception, such as section 552.136, on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

²We note that the information to be released includes the requestor's client's Texas driver's license number, which would be protected from release to the public under section 552.130. Because this exception protects personal privacy, however, the requestor has a right of access to his client's Texas driver's license information. Gov't Code § 552.023(a); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987). Should the district attorney receive another request for these same records from a person who would not have a right of access to this private information, the district attorney should resubmit these records and request another decision. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302.

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).

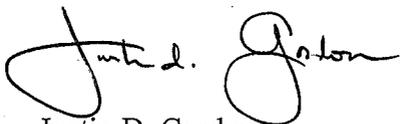
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records 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,



Justin D. Gordon
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JDG/eeg

Ref: ID# 324532

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Ronald E. Bunch
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(w/o enclosures)