



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 18, 2009

Mr. Craig Magnuson
Attorney
City of Mansfield Legal Department
1305 East Broad Street
Mansfield, Texas 76063

OR2009-03547

Dear Mr. Magnuson:

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# 341658.

The Mansfield Police Department (the "department") received a request for accident reports pertaining to public intoxication incidents during 2007 and 2008. You claim that the submitted accident reports are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the department's obligations under the Act. 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. Section 552.301(b) requires a 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* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). You state the department received the present request for information on February 4, 2009. However, you did not request a ruling from our office until February 23, 2009. Consequently, we find that the department failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301(b).

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless the governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *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 section 552.302); Open Records Decision

No. 319 (1982). Normally, a compelling interest is demonstrated when some other source of law makes the information at issue confidential or third-party interests are at stake. *See* Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977). Because section 552.101 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to withhold information, we will consider your argument under this exception.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information made confidential by other statutes, including section 550.065 of the Transportation Code. Section 550.065(b) states that except as provided by subsection (c), accident reports are privileged and confidential. Section 550.065(c)(4) provides for the release of accident reports to a person who provides two of the following three pieces of information: (1) date of the accident; (2) name of any person involved in the accident; and (3) specific location of the accident. *Id.* § 550.065(c)(4). Under this provision, the Texas Department of Transportation or another governmental entity is required to release a copy of an accident report to a person who provides the agency with two or more pieces of information specified by the statute. *Id.* In this instance, the requestor has not provided two of the three pieces of required information for any of the submitted reports. Thus, the department must withhold the submitted accident reports from this requestor in their entirety under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 550.065(b) of the Transportation Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General at (512) 475-2497.

Sincerely,



Reg Hargrove
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RJH/eb

Ref: ID# 341658

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)