



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 16, 2010

Ms. Christina R. Sanchez
Assistant County Attorney
El Paso County
500 East San Antonio, Room 503
El Paso, Texas 79901

OR2010-03712

Dear Ms. Sanchez:

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# 372720 (El Paso County Attorney File No. OP-09-620).

The El Paso County Office of the Medical Examiner (the "medical examiner") received a request for the autopsy and toxicology reports pertaining to a named individual. You state you have released or will release some of the information. You claim that the submitted photographs are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

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 protected by other statutes, such as section 11 of article 49.25 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which provides as follows:

The medical examiner shall keep full and complete records properly indexed, giving the name if known of every person whose death is investigated, the place where the body was found, the date, the cause and manner of death, and shall issue a death certificate . . . The records are subject to required public disclosure in accordance with Chapter 552, Government Code, except that a photograph or x-ray of a body taken during an autopsy is excepted from required public disclosure in accordance with Chapter 552, Government Code, but is subject to disclosure:

- (1) under a subpoena or authority of other law; or

(2) if the photograph or x-ray is of the body of a person who died while in the custody of law enforcement.

Crim. Proc. Code art. 49.25, § 11. The submitted information includes photographs of a body taken during an autopsy. You do not indicate either of the statutory exceptions to confidentiality is applicable in this instance. Thus, the medical examiner must withhold the submitted photographs of a body taken during an autopsy under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 11 of article 49.25 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. However, we note the remaining photographs are not photographs of a body taken during an autopsy. These photographs, which you have labeled as 09-0618-1-1 through 09-0618-28-1, Autopsy-1-1, Autopsy-22-1, and Autopsy-23-1, are not confidential under article 49.25, and the medical examiner may not withhold them under section 552.101 on that basis. As you raise no further exceptions against disclosure, these remaining photographs must be released.

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, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Tamara Wilcox
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

TW/dls

Ref: ID# 372720

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)