



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 24, 2011

Ms. M. Ann Montgomery
Assistant Ellis County Attorney
Ellis County
109 South Jackson
Waxahachie, Texas 75165

OR2011-01091

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# 406681.

The Ellis County Sheriff's Department (the "sheriff") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You claim portions of the submitted information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.108, 552.130, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

First, we must address the sheriff's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code, which prescribes the procedures that a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days of receiving the written request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). You state, and the request reflects, the sheriff received the request for information on October 27, 2010. Thus, the sheriff's ten-business-day deadline was November 10, 2010. However, your brief requesting a decision from this office was sent in an envelope postmarked November 12, 2010. *See id.* § 552.308 (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency mail). Thus, the sheriff failed to comply with the requirements mandated by 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 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 to overcome this presumption. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342, 350 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). You claim exceptions to disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code, which are discretionary and may be waived. *See* Gov't Code § 552.007; *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. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver). However, the interests under section 552.108 of a governmental body other than the one that failed to comply with section 552.301 can provide a compelling reason for non-disclosure under section 552.302. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 586 (1991), 469 (1987). Because you inform us the Ellis County and District Attorney (the “county attorney”) objects to the release of the information at issue, we will consider your argument regarding section 552.108. In addition, because section 552.130 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to overcome this presumption, we will consider whether this exception requires the sheriff to withhold any portion of the submitted records.

Section 552.108(a) excepts from disclosure “[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if: (1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime.” Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). Generally, a governmental body claiming section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(a); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). The county attorney objects to release of portions of the submitted information because release would interfere with a pending criminal investigation and prosecution. Based upon this representation, we conclude the release of the information you have marked would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, the sheriff may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information relating to a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state. *See* Gov't Code § 552.130(a)(1)-(2). Upon review, the sheriff must withhold the information you have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.¹

¹In Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009), this office issued a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold ten categories of information, including Texas driver's license and license plate numbers under section 552.130 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.

In summary, the sheriff may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. The sheriff must withhold the information marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.²

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,



Paige Lay
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PL/vb

Ref: ID# 406681

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

²We note the information being released contains a social security number. Section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act. *See* Gov't Code § 552.147(b).