



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

December 16, 2011

Ms. Laura Ingram  
Assistant District Attorney  
Wichita County  
900 Seventh Street  
Wichita Falls, Texas 76301-2482

OR2011-18533

Dear Ms. Ingram:

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# 439886.

The Wichita County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for a specified arson report. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We must address the sheriff's obligations under the Act. Section 552.301 describes the procedural obligations placed on a governmental body that receives a written request for information it wishes to withhold. Pursuant to section 552.301(b) of the Government Code, the governmental body must request a ruling from this office and state the exceptions to disclosure that apply within ten business days after receiving the request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). In this instance, although you state the sheriff received the request on September 27, 2011, the submitted request shows the sheriff date-stamped the request as received on September 26, 2011. Therefore, we conclude the sheriff received the request for information on September 26, 2011. Accordingly, the sheriff's ten-business-day deadline to request a ruling from this office was October 10, 2011. You did not, however, request a ruling from this office until October 12, 2011. *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, we find the sheriff failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301.

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 the requested information is public and must be released unless a compelling reason exists to withhold the information from disclosure. *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) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to section 552.302); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Generally, a compelling reason to withhold information exists where some other source of law makes the information confidential or where third party interests are at stake. Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977). Although you assert the submitted information is excepted under section 552.108 of the Government Code, this exception is discretionary in nature. It serves only to protect a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions in general), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver). As such, it does not constitute a compelling reason to withhold information for purposes of section 552.302. Thus, the sheriff may not withhold any portion of the submitted information under section 552.108 of the Government Code. As you have not claimed any other exceptions to disclosure, the sheriff must release the submitted information to the requestor.

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](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,



Nneka Kanu  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

NK/em

Ref: ID# 439886

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)