



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 22, 2012

Ms. Cheryl Elliott Thornton
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2012-07718

Dear Ms. Thornton:

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# 455228 (C.A. File No. 12PIA0137).

The Harris County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for audio recordings, video, incident reports, press releases, mug shots and booking photos pertaining to the re-enactment of a specified film on a specified date.¹ You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim.

We must address the sheriff's office's obligations under the Act. Section 552.301 of the Government Code 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(e) of the Government Code, a governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving the request (1) general written comments

¹As you have not submitted a copy of the request for information, we take our description from your brief.

stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, (2) a copy of the written request for information, (3) a signed statement or sufficient evidence showing the date the governmental body received the written request, and (4) a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e). You inform us the sheriff's office received the request on March 13, 2012. Accordingly, the sheriff's office's fifteen-business-day deadline was April 3, 2012. However, as of the date of this letter, you have not submitted for our review the request for information, comments explaining why the stated exceptions apply, or a copy or representative sample of the information requested. Consequently, we find the sheriff's office failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301.

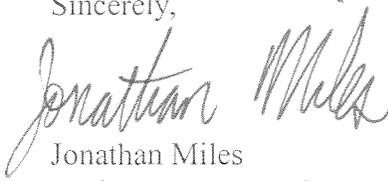
Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the information is public and must be released, unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold 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 (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. 630 (1994). A compelling reason exists when third-party interests are at stake or when information is confidential under other law. Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977). In failing to comply with section 552.301, the sheriff's office has waived section 552.108, which is a discretionary exception to disclosure. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 177 (1977) (governmental body may waive statutory predecessor to section 552.108). Although section 552.101 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to withhold information, because the sheriff's office has not submitted any information for our review, we have no basis to conclude the requested information is confidential under this exception. Thus, we have no choice but to order the sheriff's office to release the requested information in accordance with section 552.302 of the Government Code. If you believe the information is confidential and may not lawfully be released, you must challenge this ruling in court pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government 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, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jonathan Miles".

Jonathan Miles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JM/em

Ref: ID# 455228

c: Requestor