



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 7, 2012

Ms. Melanie Barton
Assistant District Attorney
Dallas County
411 Elm Street, Fifth Floor
Dallas, Texas 75202

OR2012-19719

Dear Ms. Barton:

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# 473200.

The Dallas County Health and Human Services Department (the "department") received a request for all emails to or from a named epidemiologist during a specified time frame related to the West Nile virus. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.¹

Initially, the department acknowledges, and we agree, that it failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 in requesting a ruling from our office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b), (e). A governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of the Act results in the legal presumption 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; *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); *see also* Open Records Decision

¹We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than those submitted to this office.

No. 630 (1994). 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 Nos. 630 at 3, 325 at 2 (1982). Because section 552.101 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness, we will consider your argument under section 552.101.

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. Section 552.101 encompasses section 81.046 of the Health and Safety Code, which provides in part:

(a) Reports, records, and information received from any source, including from a federal agency or from another state, furnished to a public healthdistrict, a health authority, a local health department, or the [Texas Department of State Health Services] that relate to cases or suspected cases of diseases or health conditions are confidential and may be used only for the purposes of this chapter.

(b) Reports, records, and information relating to cases or suspected cases of diseases or health conditions are not public information under [the Act], and may not be released or made public on subpoena or otherwise except as provided by Subsections (c), (d), and (f).

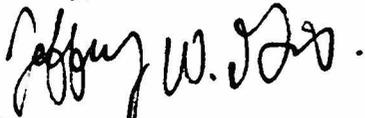
Health & Safety Code § 81.046(a), (b). In Open Records Decision No. 577 (1990), this office concluded that any information acquired or created during an investigation under chapter 81 of the Health and Safety Code is confidential and may not be released unless an exception set out in the statute applies. *See id.* § 81.046(b)-(d), (f); ORD 577. You explain the submitted information was gathered or created by the department during an investigation under chapter 81 of a West Nile virus outbreak. Based on your representations and our review, we agree section 81.046 governs the release of this information. None of the release provisions of section 81.046 appears to be applicable. Accordingly, we determine the department must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 81.046 of the Health and Safety 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 black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey W. Giles".

Jeffrey W. Giles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWG/dls

Ref: ID#473200

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)