



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 20, 2013

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

OR2013-16349

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# 499989 (C.A. File No. 13PIA0309).

The Harris County Constable, Precinct 8 (the "constable's office") received a request for departmental policies and procedures for patrol officers who conduct "inventory searches" subsequent to the arresting of an individual before a vehicle is towed to the impound lot and information from a specified police officer's personnel file.¹ You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, 552.107, 552.108, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim.

We must address the constable's office's procedural obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code when requesting a decision from this office under the Act. Pursuant to section 552.301(e), a governmental body must submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records request (1) written comments 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

¹Since you did not submit the requestor's written request for information, we take our description from your brief to this office.

information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e). In this instance, you state the constable's office received the request for information on June 28, 2013. We note July 4, 2013, was a holiday. This office does not count the date the request was received or holidays as business days for the purpose of calculating a governmental body's deadlines under the Act. Accordingly, the fifteen-business-day deadline was July 22, 2013. As of the date of this letter, you have not submitted to this office written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, a copy of the written request for information, or a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples. Consequently, we conclude the constable's office failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 with regard to this request.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with 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). Because the constable's office has failed to comply with the procedural requirements of the Act, the constable's office has waived all of its discretionary exceptions to disclosure. *See* Open Records Decision No. 663 at 5 (1999) (untimely request for decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions). Although the constable's office raises mandatory exceptions to disclosure, because you have not submitted the requested information for our review, we have no basis for finding any of the information excepted from disclosure or confidential by law. Thus, we have no choice but to order the requested information released pursuant to section 552.302. 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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Wheelus", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David L. Wheelus
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DLW/dls

Ref: ID# 499989

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)