



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 26, 2014

Ms. Victoria Pearce
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Public Safety
P.O. Box 4087
Austin, Texas 78773-0001

OR2014-05039

Dear Ms. Pearce:

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# 519777 (PIR No. 14-0334).

The Department of Public Safety (the "department") received a request for certain information pertaining to a specified car accident. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered your claim.

We must address the department'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. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301. 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 information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. *Id.* § 552.301(e). As of the date of this letter, you have not submitted written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, or a copy or representative samples of the requested information. Therefore, we conclude the department failed to comply with the procedural requirements mandated by section 552.301(e).

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 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 No. 630 (1994). Section 552.108 is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests. *See Simmons*, 166 S.W.3d at 350 (section 552.108 is not compelling reason to withhold information under section 552.302); Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 5 (2000) (untimely request for decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 (1977) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver). *But see* Open Records Decision No. 586 at 2-3 (1991) (claim of another governmental body under statutory predecessor to section 552.108 can provide compelling reason for non-disclosure). Thus, the department's claim under section 552.108 is not a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness. Therefore, we have no choice but to order the department to release the responsive information in accordance with section 552.302 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,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/dls

Ref: ID# 519777

c: Requestor