



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 17, 2014

Ms. Susan Fillion
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County Attorney's Office
1200 Baker Street, 2nd Floor
Houston, Texas 77002-1206

OR2014-16471

Dear Ms. Fillion:

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# 536793 (HCSO File No. 14SO60057).

The Harris County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for the 9-1-1 call and print-out sheet relating to a specified incident and to inspect a specified motor vehicle. The sheriff's office claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception the sheriff's office claims and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the requestor seeks to inspect the specified motor vehicle. The Act applies to "public information," which is defined in section 552.002 of the Government Code. Section 552.002 provides, in pertinent part:

(a) In this chapter, "public information" means information that is written, produced, collected, assembled, or maintained under a law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business:

- (1) by a governmental body;
- (2) for a governmental body and the governmental body:
 - (A) owns the information;

(B) has a right of access to the information; or

(C) spends or contributes public money for the purpose of writing, producing, collecting, assembling, or maintaining the information; or

(3) by an individual officer or employee of a governmental body in the officer's or employee's official capacity and the information pertains to official business of the governmental body.

Gov't Code § 552.002(a). This office has ruled tangible physical items are not "information," as that term is contemplated under the Act. *See* Open Records Decision No. 581 (1990). Thus, the motor vehicle is not public information for purposes of section 552.002 of the Government Code and the Act does not require the sheriff's office to make the motor vehicle available to the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.021.

Next, we must address the sheriff'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(b), within ten business days after receiving a written request the governmental body must request a ruling from this office and state the exceptions to disclosure that apply. *Id.* § 552.301(b). The sheriff's office states it received the request for information on June 27, 2014. We note July 4, 2014, 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. The sheriff's office does not inform us it was closed for business on any of the other days at issue. Accordingly, the ten-business-day deadline was July 14, 2014. However, the sheriff's office submitted the information required under section 552.301(b) in an envelope bearing a meter-mark of July 15, 2014. *See id.* § 552.308(a)(1) (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency mail). Consequently, we find the sheriff's office failed to comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code.

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). The sheriff's office claims section 552.108 of the Government Code for the submitted information. However, this exception is discretionary in nature. It serves to protect a governmental body's interests and may be waived; as such, it does not

constitute a compelling reason to withhold information. *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 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver). Accordingly, the sheriff's office may not withhold any portion of the submitted information under section 552.108 of the Government Code. As the sheriff's office raises no other exceptions to disclosure, the sheriff's office must release the submitted information.

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,



David L. Wheelus
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DLW/bhf

Ref: ID# 536793

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)