



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 21, 2016

Mr. Douglas E. Manning
Assistant County Attorney
Orange County
801 Division
Orange, Texas 77630

OR2016-06415

Dear Mr. Manning:

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# 602793.

The Orange County Office of Emergency Management (the "county") received a request for the 2014 and 2015 applications for Emergency Management Preparedness Grants, including the Emergency Management Performance Grant and Port Security Grant, and the award documents for the 2015 Port Security Grant. You state you have released some information to the requestor. You claim 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.

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 information protected by other statutes, including federal law. On November 25, 2002, the president signed the federal Homeland Security Act ("HSA"). The HSA created the United States Department of Homeland Security ("DHS") and transferred the Transportation Security Administration ("TSA"), a new agency created in the Department of Transportation ("DOT") the previous year to oversee the security of transportation, to DHS. *See* 6 U.S.C. §§ 111, 203.

In connection with the transfer of TSA to DHS, the HSA also transferred TSA's authority concerning sensitive security information ("SSI") under section 40119 of title 49 of the United States Code to section 114(r) of title 49 of the United States Code and amended section 40119 to vest similar SSI authority in the secretary of DOT.¹ Section 114(r) of title 49 states, in relevant part:

(1) Notwithstanding [the Federal Freedom of Information Act (the "FOIA"),] the Under Secretary [for Transportation Security, head of TSA] shall prescribe regulations prohibiting the disclosure of information obtained or developed in carrying out security under authority of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act . . . if the Under Secretary decides disclosing the information would –

(A) be an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy;

(B) reveal a trade secret or privileged or confidential commercial or financial information; or

(C) be detrimental to the security of transportation.

49 U.S.C. § 114(r)(1). This provision authorizes the TSA's Under Secretary to prescribe regulations that prohibit disclosure of information requested not only under the FOIA, but also under other disclosure statutes. *Cf. Public Citizen, Inc. v. Federal Aviation Admin.*, 988 F.2d 186, 194 (D.C. Cir. 1993) (former section 40119 authorized Federal Aviation Administration administrator to prescribe regulations prohibiting disclosure of information under other statutes as well as under FOIA). Thus, the Under Secretary is authorized by section 114(r) to prescribe regulations that prohibit disclosure of information requested under the Act.

Pursuant to the mandate and authority of section 114 of title 49, TSA published regulations in title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations that took effect June 17, 2004. *See* 69 Fed. Reg. 28066. Section 1520.1(a) of these regulations provides that the regulations govern the "maintenance, safeguarding, and disclosure of records and information that TSA has determined to be [SSI], as defined in § 1520.5." 49 C.F.R. § 1520.1(a). Section 1520.7 states that the covered persons to which these regulations apply include, among others, to "[e]ach person who has access to SSI, as specified in § 1520.11." *Id.* § 1520.7(j). Pursuant to section 1520.11(a), a person has a need to know SSI "[w]hen the person requires access to specific SSI to carry out transportation security activities approved, accepted, funded, recommended, or directed by DHS or DOT." *Id.* § 1520.11(a)(1). Section 1520.11(b)(1) further states that a state or local government employee, contractor, or grantee has a need to

¹This ruling does not construe the parallel federal statutes and regulations that apply to DOT.

know SSI “if access to the information is necessary for performance of the employee’s official duties on behalf or in defense of” the interests of the local government. *Id.* § 1520.11(b)(1). Section 1520.11(b)(2) further states a state or local government employee, contractor, or grantee has a need to know SSI if the person is “acting in the performance of a . . . grant from” a federal government agency “if access to the information is necessary to performance of the . . . grant.” *Id.* § 1520.11(b)(2). Thus, the regulations in title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations apply to the county.

As to the release of information by persons other than TSA, section 1520.9(a) of title 49 provides in part that a person to which these regulations apply has a duty to protect information and may disclose SSI “only to covered persons who have a need to know, unless otherwise authorized in writing by TSA, the Coast Guard, or the Secretary of DOT.” *Id.* § 1520.9(a)(2). Section 1520.9(a)(3) of title 49 further provides that those covered by the regulation must “[r]efer requests by other persons for SSI to TSA or the applicable component or agency within DOT or DHS.” *Id.* § 1520.9(a)(3). SSI is defined to include certain information obtained or developed in the conduct of security activities, the disclosure of which TSA has determined would constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy, reveal trade secrets or privileged or confidential information obtained from any person, or be detrimental to the security of transportation. *Id.* § 1520.5(a). Section 1520.5(b) of title 49 specifically defines fifteen categories of SSI and provides SSI includes “[a]ny information not otherwise described in [section 1520.5] that TSA determines is SSI under 49 U.S.C. 114(s) or that the Secretary of DOT determines is SSI under 49 U.S.C. 40119.” *See id.* § 1520.5(b).

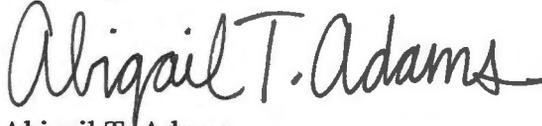
The submitted information consists of information pertaining to a grant application made to DHS. You state the submitted information consists of SSI. Based on the statutory and regulatory scheme described above and our review, we conclude the decision to release or withhold the submitted information is not for this office or the county to make, but rather is a decision for the Under Secretary as head of the TSA. *See English v. Gen. Elec. Co.*, 496 U.S. 72, 79 (1990) (state law is preempted to extent it actually conflicts with federal law). Therefore, the county may not release the submitted information at this time under the Act, but instead must refer the information to the TSA to make a determination concerning disclosure of that 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abigail T. Adams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Abigail T. Adams
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ATA/akg

Ref: ID# 602793

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)