



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 15, 2015

Mr. Timothy J. Mason
County Attorney
County of Andrews
121 Northwest Avenue A
Andrews, Texas 79714

OR2015-14383

Dear Mr. Mason:

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# 571494.

The Andrews County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You state the sheriff's office will release some of the requested information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the sheriff's office's procedural obligations under the Act. Section 552.301 describes the procedural obligations placed on a governmental body that receives a written request for information it wishes to withhold. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), the governmental body must ask for the attorney general's decision and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days after receiving the request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). In this instance, you state the sheriff's office received the request for information on April 17, 2015. Accordingly, the sheriff's office's ten-business-day deadline was May 1, 2015. However, the envelope in which you the sheriff's office submitted its request for a decision was meter-marked May 6, 2015. *See id.* § 552.308 (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 the requirements of section 552.301 in requesting this decision from our office.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the information is public. Information that is presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information to overcome this presumption. *See 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); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). A compelling reason exists when third-party interests are at stake, or when information is confidential by law. Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977). Section 552.108 is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests and generally is not a compelling reason to withhold information. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (untimely request for decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 (1977) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver).* In failing to comply with section 552.301, the sheriff's office has waived its claim under section 552.108. However, we note some of the submitted information is subject to section 552.130 of the Government Code.¹ Because section 552.130 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness, we will consider its applicability to the submitted information.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code exempts from disclosure information that relates to a motor vehicle operator's license or driver's license or a motor vehicle title or registration issued by a Texas agency, or an agency of another state or country. *See Gov't Code* § 552.130(a)(1)-(2). Upon review, we find the sheriff's office must withhold the motor vehicle record information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. As you raise no further exceptions, the remaining information must be released.²


¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).*

²We note the information being released contains the requestor's driver's license information, to which the requestor has a right of access under section 552.023 of the Government Code. *See Gov't Code* §§ 552.023(a), .130; Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987). We note section 552.130(c) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact information protected by section 552.130(a)(1) without the necessity of requesting a decision under the Act. *See Gov't Code* § 552.130(c). If a governmental body redacts such information, it must notify the requestor in accordance with section 552.130(e). *See id.* § 552.130(d), (e). Thus, if the sheriff's office receives another request for this same information from a person who does not have such a right of access, section 552.130(c) authorizes the sheriff's office to redact the requestor's driver's license 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,



Jennifer Luttrall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JL/cbz

Ref: ID# 571494

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)