



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 8, 2016

Mr. Carlos G. Madrid  
Assistant County Attorney  
County of El Paso  
500 East San Antonio, Room 503  
El Paso, Texas 79901

OR2016-24908

Dear Mr. Madrid:

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# 633421 (ORR# 0284-16-PI).

The El Paso County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information pertaining to vehicular or bicycle accidents occurring at a specified location during a specified date range, excluding a specified report. The sheriff's office states it has released most of the requested information. The sheriff's office claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.1085 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions the sheriff's office claims 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. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes, including section 11 of article 49.25 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which provides as follows:

- (a) The medical examiner shall keep full and complete records properly indexed, giving the name if known of every person whose death is investigated, the place where the body was found, the date, the cause and manner of death, and shall issue a death certificate. . . . The records may not be withheld, subject to a discretionary exception under [the Act], except that

a photograph or x-ray of a body taken during an autopsy is excepted from required public disclosure in accordance with [the Act], but is subject to disclosure:

- (1) under a subpoena or authority of other law; or
- (2) if the photograph or x-ray is of the body of a person who died while in the custody of law enforcement.

Crim. Proc. Code art. 49.25, § 11(a). Upon review, we find some of the information the sheriff's office has indicated consists of photographs of the decedent's body taken during an autopsy. The sheriff's office does not indicate either of the statutory exceptions to confidentiality is applicable in this instance. Accordingly, we find the sheriff's office must withhold the submitted photographs taken during autopsies of the decedent, which we have indicated, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 11 of article 49.25 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. However, the remaining photograph at issue is not a photograph or x-ray of a body taken during an autopsy. Thus, the remaining information the sheriff's office has indicated is not confidential under article 49.25, and the sheriff's office may not withhold it under section 552.101 on that basis.

Section 552.1085 of the Government Code, provides, in pertinent part:

- (c) A sensitive crime scene image in the custody of a governmental body is confidential and excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021 and a governmental body may not permit a person to view or copy the image except as provided by this section. This section applies to any sensitive crime scene image regardless of the date that the image was taken or recorded.

Gov't Code § 552.1085(c). For purposes of section 552.1085, "sensitive crime scene image" means "a photograph or video recording taken at a crime scene, contained in or part of a closed criminal case, that depicts a deceased person in a state of dismemberment, decapitation, or similar mutilation or that depicts the deceased person's genitalia." *See id.* § 552.1085(a)(6). The sheriff's office argues the photographs it has indicated consist of sensitive crime scene images that were taken at a crime scene. We understand the information at issue relates to a criminal case that is now closed. Further, the sheriff's office does not indicate any of the exceptions in section 552.1085 apply in this instance. Based on these representations and our review, we agree the photographs the sheriff's office has indicated consist of sensitive crime scene images for purposes of section 552.1085. Therefore, the sheriff's office must withhold the photographs it has indicated under section 552.1085(c) of the Government Code.

In summary, the sheriff's office must withhold the submitted photographs taken during autopsies of the decedent, which we have indicated, under section 552.101 of the

Government Code in conjunction with section 11 of article 49.25 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The sheriff's office must withhold the photographs it has indicated under section 552.1085(c) of the Government Code. The remaining photograph must be released.

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](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,



Rahat Huq  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

RSH/som

Ref: ID# 633421

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)