



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 7, 2016

Ms. Kristen Lee
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2016-27120

Dear Ms. Lee:

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# 643712 (C.A. File No. 16PIA0661).

The Harris County Constable's Office, Precinct 4 (the "constable's office") received a request for information relating to the destruction or loss of evidence in the custody of the constable's office prior to January 2016. 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, you acknowledge, and we agree, the constable's office failed to meet the statutory deadlines imposed by section 552.301 of the Government Code for the requested information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code 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. *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). 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). Although the constable's office seeks to withhold the

information under section 552.108 of the Government Code, section 552.108 is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interest and may be waived. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions in general), 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). Accordingly, none of the submitted information may be withheld under section 552.108 of the Government Code. As you raise no other exception to disclosure, the submitted information 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, 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,



Britni Ramirez
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BR/bhf

Ref: ID# 643712

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)