



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 5, 2017

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

OR2017-00337

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# 640666 (File No. 16PIA0612).

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (the "institute") received a request for the autopsy report of a named individual.<sup>1</sup> You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 through 552.156 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim.

Initially, we must address the institute's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code, which prescribes the procedural obligations that a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Pursuant to section 552.301(e), a governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records request (1) written comments stating the reasons why the claimed exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, (2) a copy of the written request for information, (3) a signed statement or sufficient evidence showing the date the governmental body received the written request, and (4) a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(A)-(D). You inform us the institute received the request for information on October 10, 2016. However, as of the date of this letter, you have not submitted to this office a copy of the written request for information, written comments stating the reasons why the claimed exceptions apply, or a copy or representative sample of the information requested.

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<sup>1</sup>As you have not submitted the request for information, we take our description from your brief.

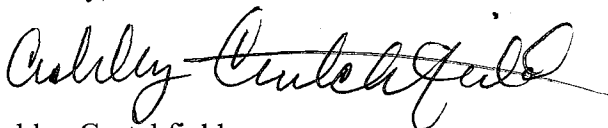
Accordingly, we conclude the institute failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301.

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. *See* Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977). Because the institute has failed to comply with the procedural requirements of the Act, the institute has waived all of its discretionary exceptions to disclosure. *See* Open Records Decision No. 663 at 5 (1999) (untimely request for decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions). Although the institute also raises mandatory exceptions to disclosure, because you have not submitted the requested information for our review, we have no basis for finding any of the information excepted from disclosure or confidential by law. Thus, we have no choice but to order the requested information released pursuant to section 552.302. If you believe the information is confidential and may not lawfully be released, you must challenge this ruling in court pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code.

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,



Ashley Crutchfield  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

AC/bw

Ref: ID# 640666

c: Requestor