



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 9, 2017

Ms. Kristin K. Bloodworth  
Assistant Criminal District Attorney  
Civil Section  
Bexar County  
101 West Nueva Street, 7th Floor  
San Antonio, Texas 78205

OR2017-02900

Dear Ms. Bloodworth

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# 650890 (PIR No. 5521).

The Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office (the "medical examiner's office") received a request for the autopsy and toxicology report regarding a named individual. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the medical examiner'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), (e). Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless there is a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.);

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<sup>1</sup>Although you initially raised section 552.101 of the Government Code as an exception to disclosure, you provided no arguments regarding the applicability of this section. Accordingly, we assume you no longer assert this section. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302.

*Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (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 medical examiner's office seeks to withhold the submitted 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). However, the need of a governmental body, other than the one that failed to timely seek an open records decision, to withhold information under section 552.108 can provide a compelling reason under section 552.302. Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991). You assert, and provide documentation showing, the Bexar County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") has a law enforcement interest in the submitted information. Therefore, we will consider whether the medical examiner's office may withhold the submitted information on behalf of the sheriff's office under section 552.108.

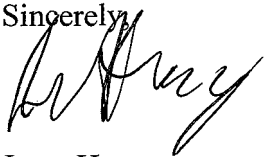
Section 552.108(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "[I]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if: (1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). Generally, a governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(1) must explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state, and provide documentation showing, the sheriff's office objects to the release of the information at issue because it pertains to a pending criminal investigation or prosecution. Based upon this representation, we conclude section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable, and the release of the information at issue would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist] 1975) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, the medical examiner's office may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code on behalf of the sheriff's office.

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, appearing to read "Jesse Harvey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "H" and "V".

Jesse Harvey  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JH/bw

Ref: ID# 650890

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)