



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 30, 2017

Ms. Agatha Wade
Assistant Criminal District Attorney
Civil Section
Bexar County
101 West Nueva Street, Seventh Floor
San Antonio, Texas 78205

OR2017-11753

Dear Ms. Wade:

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# 665859 (Bexar County File # 5752 & 5777, ME 17-0398).

The Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office (the "medical examiner's office") received two requests for a specified autopsy report and toxicology report. 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 medical examiner's office's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code, which prescribes the procedures a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days of receiving the written request. *See id.* § 552.301(b). The medical examiner's office received the first request for information on April 20, 2017. We note this office does not count the date the request was received or holidays for the purpose of calculating a governmental body's deadlines under the Act. Accordingly, you were required to request a decision from this office by May , 2017. However, the envelope in which the medical examiner's office requested a decision was postmarked May 5, 2017. *See id.* § 552.308(a)(1) (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United

States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency mail). Accordingly, we conclude the medical examiner's office failed to comply with the procedural requirements mandated by section 552.301 of the Government Code with respect to the first request.

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, 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). The need of a governmental body, other than the governmental body that failed to timely seek an open records decision, to withhold information under section 552.108 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason sufficient to overcome the presumption of openness. *See* Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991). Because you inform us, and provide documentation showing, the San Antonio Police Department (the "department") objects to the release of the information at issue, we will consider whether the medical examiner's office may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108 of the Government Code on behalf of the department.

Section 552.108(a)(1) 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 . . . release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). 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). Section 552.108 may be invoked by the proper custodian of information relating to a pending investigation or prosecution of criminal conduct. *See* Open Records Decision No. 474 at 4-5 (1987). Where a non-law enforcement agency has custody of information that would otherwise qualify for exception under section 552.108 as information relating to the pending case of a law enforcement agency, the custodian of the records may withhold the information if it provides this office with a demonstration the information relates to the pending case and a representation from the law enforcement agency that it wishes to have the information withheld.

You state the submitted information is related to a criminal investigation that is pending with the department. You state the department objects to disclosure of the information at issue because its release would interfere with the investigation. Based on your representation, we conclude the medical examiner's office may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code on behalf of the department.¹ *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining argument against disclosure of this information.

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).

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 "Paige Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paige Thompson
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PT/eb

Ref: ID# 665859

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)