



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 16, 2019

Mr. Barry L. Macha
General Counsel
Midwestern State University
3410 Taft Boulevard
Wichita Falls, Texas 76308-2099

OR2019-29008

Dear Mr. Macha:

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# 791712.

Midwestern State University (the "university") received a request for information pertaining to specified legislation and communications regarding Title IX. Although the university takes no position as to whether the requested information is excepted under the Act, the university states release of the requested information may implicate the proprietary interests of certain third parties. Accordingly, the university states it notified the third parties of the request for information and of the right to submit arguments to this office as to why the requested information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in the Act in certain circumstances).

We must address the university's obligations under the Act. Section 552.301 of the Government Code prescribes the procedures 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). You state, and provide documentation demonstrating, the university received the request for information on July 24, 2019. However, as of the date of this letter, the university has not submitted to this office a copy or representative sample of the information requested.

Accordingly, we conclude the university failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301(e) of the Government Code.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to submit to this office the information required in section 552.301(e) results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released. Information that is presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information to overcome this presumption. *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); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Third party interests can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness caused by a failure to comply with section 552.301. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302; Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977) (construing predecessor statute). We note an interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should be withheld from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As the university has not provided a copy of the requested information for our review, and the interested third parties have not submitted arguments objecting to disclosure of the requested information, we have no basis for finding any of the requested information excepted from disclosure. Thus, we have no choice but to order the university to release the requested information in accordance with section 552.302 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 <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



D. Michelle Case
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DMC/be

Ref: ID# 791712

c: Requestor