



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 16, 2019

Mr. Miguel Salinas  
Staff Attorney  
Brownsville Independent School District  
1900 Price Road  
Brownsville, Texas 78521-2417

OR2019-35418

Dear Mr. Salinas:

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# 804205 (ORR No. 8724).

The Brownsville Independent School District (the "district") received a request for a specified incident report. The district claims the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception the district claims.

Initially, we note the United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office has informed this office the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), section 1232g of title 20 of the United States Code, does not permit state and local educational authorities to disclose to this office, without parental or an adult student's consent, unredacted, personally identifiable information contained in education records for the purpose of our review in the open records ruling process under the Act.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, state and local educational authorities that receive a request for education records from a member of the public under the Act must not submit education records to this office in unredacted form, that is, in a form in which "personally identifiable information" is disclosed. *See* 34 C.F.R. § 99.3 (defining "personally identifiable information"); *see also*

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of this letter may be found on the Office of the Attorney General's website at [https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/files/divisions/open\\_government/20060725\\_USDOE\\_FERPA.pdf](https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/files/divisions/open_government/20060725_USDOE_FERPA.pdf).

Open Records Decision No. 224 (1979) (student's handwritten comments protected under FERPA because they would make identity of student easily traceable through handwriting, style of expression, or particular incidents related in the comments). The district asserts FERPA applies to the requested documents. We note FERPA is not applicable to law enforcement records maintained by the district's police department (the "department") that were created by the department for a law enforcement purpose. *See* 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(a)(4)(B)(ii); 34 C.F.R. §§ 99.3, 99.8. In this instance, it appears the requested information was created for and is maintained by the department for a law enforcement purpose. Accordingly, the requested information is not subject to FERPA and it may not be withheld on that basis.

Next, we must address the district's obligations under the Act. Section 552.301 of the Government Code prescribes the procedures that a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is exempted from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301. 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. *Id.* § 552.301(e). The district received the request for information on September 30, 2019. As of this date, the district has not submitted to this office a copy or representative sample of the information requested. Accordingly, we conclude the district 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 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). Although the district raises an exception to disclosure, because the district has not submitted the requested information for our review, we have no basis for finding any of the information exempted from disclosure. Thus, we have no choice but to order the requested information released pursuant to section 552.302.

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

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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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paige Lay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paige Lay  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

PL/mo

Ref: ID# 804205

c: Requestor