



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 6, 2020

Ms. Melanie Bybee
Administrative Assistant
Somervell County Sheriff's Office
P.O. Box 3268
Glen Rose, Texas 76043

OR2020-00385

Dear Ms. Bybee:

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# 804620.

The Somervell County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information pertaining to specified incidents. The sheriff's office indicates it will withhold information pursuant to section 552.130(c) of the Government Code.¹ The sheriff's office states it has released some of the requested information, but claims some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exception and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the procedural obligations of the sheriff's office under section 552.301 of the Government Code, which prescribes the procedures 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(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. Gov't Code § 552.301(b). The sheriff's office does not inform us when it received the request for information. However, the copy of the request is stamped as having been received by the sheriff's office on October 7, 2019. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(C). Thus, the sheriff's office's ten-business-day deadline to request a ruling was October 21, 2019. The envelope containing the request for a ruling from this office is

¹ Section 552.130(c) of the Government Code allows a governmental body to redact the information described in section 552.130(a) without the necessity of seeking a decision from the attorney general. *See* Gov't Code § 552.130(c). If a governmental body redacts such information, it must notify the requestor in accordance with section 552.130(e). *See id.* § 552.130(d), (e).

postmarked October 22, 2019. *See* Gov't Code § 552.308 (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail). Therefore, the sheriff's office failed to comply with the procedural requirements mandated by 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 (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). We find the sheriff's office has failed to establish a compelling reason to address section 552.108 of the Government Code. However, because section 552.101 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness, we will address the applicability of this section to the information at issue.²

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). Under the common-law right of privacy, an individual has a right to be free from the publicizing of private affairs in which the public has no legitimate concern. *Id.* at 682. The Third Court of Appeals has concluded public citizens' dates of birth are protected by common-law privacy pursuant to section 552.101. *See Paxton v. City of Dallas*, No. 03-13-00546-CV, 2015 WL 3394061, at *3 (Tex. App.—Austin May 22, 2015, pet. denied) (mem. op.). The requestor has a right of access to her own date of birth pursuant to section 552.023 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(a); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individuals request information concerning themselves). Nevertheless, the sheriff's office must withhold the remaining dates of birth under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The sheriff's office must release the remaining information.³

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.

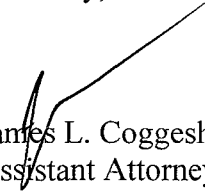
This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable

² The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 at 2 (1987), 480 at 5 (1987).

³ Because the requestor has a special right of access to some of the information being released, the sheriff's office must again seek a decision from this office if it receives another request for the same information from another requestor.

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,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/eb

Ref: ID# 804620

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)