



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 28, 2020

Ms. Tiffany Bangs
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2020-24339

Dear Ms. Bangs:

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# 846290 (HCA File No. 20PIA0450).

The Harris County Constable's Office, Precinct One, (the "constable's office") received a request for specified phone records of a named individual.¹ The constable's office claims the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 through 552.154 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions the constable's office claims.

We must address the constable's office'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 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). Further, 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). We understand the constable's office received the request for information on July 6, 2020. This office does not count the date the request was received or holidays for purposes of calculating a

¹ As the constable's office has not submitted a copy of the request for information, we take our description from its brief.

governmental body's deadlines under the Act. Accordingly, the constable's office was required to provide the information required by section 552.301(b) by July 20, 2020. Moreover, the constable's office was required to provide the information required by section 552.301(e) by July 27, 2020. We note the envelope in which the constable's office provided the information required by section 552.301(b) does not bear a postmark. However, the envelope bears a certified mail tracking number that indicates it was mailed on July 21, 2020. *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). Further, as of this date, the constable's office has not submitted to this office written comments stating the reasons why its claimed exceptions apply, a copy of the written request for information, or a copy or representative sample of the information requested. Consequently, we conclude the constable's office failed to comply with the procedural requirements mandated by section 552.301 of the Government Code.

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 constable's office raises exceptions to disclosure, because it has not submitted the requested information for our review, we have no basis for finding any of the information excepted from disclosure. Thus, we have no choice but to order the requested information released pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code. If the constable's office believes the information may not lawfully be released, it must challenge this ruling in court pursuant to section 552.324 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,

Gerald A. Arismendez
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

GAA/be

Ref: ID# 846290

c: Requestor