



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 5, 2020

Ms. Kristen Barnebey
County District Attorney
County of Aransas
3840 Highway 35
Rockport, Texas 78382

OR2020-27854

Dear Ms. Barnebey:

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# 852968.

The County of Aransas (the "county") received a request for a specified contract and payment information pertaining to the services at issue in the specified contract. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, 552.1175, and 552.152 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim. We have also received and considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit written comments regarding why information should or should not be released).

We must address the department'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. Pursuant to subsection 552.301(e), a governmental body must submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records request (1) written comments stating the reasons why the stated 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

¹ We note, although you also raise section 552.022 of the Government Code, section 552.022 is not an exception to disclosure. Rather, section 552.022 enumerates categories of information that are not excepted from disclosure unless they are made confidential under the Act or other law. *See* Gov't Code § 552.022.

which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. *See id.* § 552.301(e). The county received the request for information on July 30, 2020. Accordingly, you were required to provide the information required by subsection 552.301(e) by August, 20, 2020. As of the date of this letter, you have not submitted for our review comments stating the reasons why the claimed exceptions apply or a copy or representative sample of the information requested. Consequently, we find the county failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 in requesting this decision from our office.

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 county raises exceptions to disclosure, because you have 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. If you believe the information may not lawfully be released, you 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,

Emily Kunst
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

EK/be

Ref: ID# 852968

c: Requestor