



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 23, 2022

Mr. Lee I. Correa
Counsel for Smith County
Flowers & Davis, P.L.L.C.
1021 East Southeast Loop 323, Suite 200
Tyler, Texas 75701

OR2022-29449

Dear Mr. Correa:

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# 971406.

Smith County (the "county"), which you represent, received two requests from the same requestor for several categories of information pertaining to the requestor's client. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim.

We must address the county'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 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. *See id.* § 552.301(e). In this instance, you state, and provide documentation showing, the county received the instant requests for information on July 8, 2022. However, as of the date of this letter, you have not submitted for our review a copy of the written comments explaining why the stated exceptions apply or a copy or representative sample of the information

requested. Consequently, we conclude the county failed to comply with the procedural 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 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,

Kimbell Kesling
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KK/mo

Ref: ID# 971406

c: Requestor