



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 25, 2004

Ms. Julie Joe
Assistant County Attorney
Travis County
P. O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767

OR2004-5216

Dear Ms. Joe:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 204397.

The Travis County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for information pertaining to a specified individual. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure pursuant to sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the submitted information.

You claim that portions of the requested information are excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law right to privacy.¹ Information is protected from disclosure by the common-law right to privacy when (1) it is highly intimate or embarrassing, such that its release would be highly objectionable to a person of ordinary sensibilities and (2) there is no legitimate public interest in its disclosure. *See Industrial Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976), *cert. denied*, 430 U.S. 931 (1977). Where an individual's criminal history information has been compiled by a governmental entity, the information takes on a character that implicates the individual's right to privacy. *See United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749 (1989). In this instance, the requestor seeks copies of unspecified information in which a specified individual is identified. Thus, the request requires the sheriff to compile information relating to this

¹ Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision. *See Gov't Code § 552.101*. Section 552.101 encompasses information that is protected from disclosure by the common-law right to privacy.

individual. Based on the reasoning set out in *Reporters Committee*, we conclude that such a compilation implicates the specified individual's right to privacy to the extent that it includes investigations where the named individual was a criminal suspect, arrestee, or defendant. Accordingly, we conclude that to the extent that the sheriff maintains responsive information that reveals that the specified individual was a criminal suspect, arrestee, or defendant, such information must be withheld from disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law right to privacy.

In addition, you claim that portions of the submitted information are excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code. Section 552.108(a)(2) protects records pertaining to criminal investigations or prosecutions that have concluded in a final result other than conviction or a deferred adjudication. See Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(2). You state that the portions of the submitted information, which you have marked, pertain to closed criminal investigations that did not result in conviction or deferred adjudication. Accordingly, we agree that section 552.108(a)(2) applies to these portions of the submitted information.

We note, however, that section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. See Gov't Code § 552.108(c). We believe such basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle Publishing Company v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), writ *ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). See Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of basic information that must be made available to public, to include detailed description of offense). Accordingly, we conclude that with the exception of basic information that must be released to the requestor, the sheriff may withhold this marked information pursuant to section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code. We note, however, that the sheriff maintains the discretion to release all or part of this particular marked information that is not otherwise confidential by law. See Gov't Code § 552.007.

In summary, to the extent that the sheriff maintains responsive information that reveals that the specified individual was a criminal suspect, arrestee, or defendant, such information must be withheld from disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law right to privacy. With the exception of basic information that must be released to the requestor, the sheriff may withhold the information that it has marked pursuant to section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by

filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Ronald J. Bounds
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RJB/krl

Ref: ID# 204397

Enc. Marked documents

c: Ms. Jeanette Guerrero Diaz
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(w/o enclosures)