



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

April 3, 2006

Mr. Mark G. Mann
Assistant City Attorney
City of Garland
P.O. Box 469002
Garland, Texas 75046-9002

OR2006-03293

Dear Mr. Mann:

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# 245406.

The City of Garland (the "city") received a request for the personnel file of a former city employee. You claim that portions of the requested information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.117, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This provision encompasses information made confidential by federal law. An I-9 Form is governed by title 8, section 1324a of the United States Code, which provides that the form "may not be used for purposes other than for enforcement of this chapter" and for enforcement of other federal statutes governing crime and criminal investigations. 8 U.S.C. § 1324a(b)(5). Release of this document under the Act would be "for purposes other than for enforcement" of the referenced federal statute. Accordingly, we conclude that the submitted I-9 Form is confidential for purposes of section 552.101 of the Government Code and may only be released in compliance with the federal laws and regulations governing the employment verification system.

Section 552.101 also encompasses information that other statutes make confidential. Prior decisions of this office have held that section 6103(a) of title 26 of the United States Code, which is encompassed by section 552.101, renders tax return information confidential. *See* Attorney General Opinion H-1274 (1978) (tax returns); Open Records Decision Nos. 600 (1992) (W-4 forms), 226 (1979) (W-2 forms). Tax return information is defined as data furnished to or collected by the Internal Revenue Service with respect to the determination of possible existence of liability of any person under title 26 of the United States Code for any tax. *See* 26 U.S.C. § 6103(b). The submitted W-4 form is tax return information that must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with federal law.

Section 552.101 also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy. Common-law privacy protects information if (1) the information contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) the information is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976).

This office has found that information that reflects an individual's personal financial decisions and is not related to a financial transaction between the individual and a governmental body is generally excepted from disclosure under common-law privacy. Open Records Decision Nos. 600 (1992) (public employee's withholding allowance certificate, designation of beneficiary of employee's retirement benefits, direct deposit authorization, and employee's decisions regarding voluntary benefits programs, among others, protected under common-law privacy), 545 (1990) (deferred compensation information, mortgage payments, assets, bills, and credit history protected under common-law privacy). This office has also ruled, however, that the public has a legitimate interest in the essential facts about a financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision No. 600 (1992) (information revealing that employee participates in group insurance plan funded partly or wholly by governmental body is not excepted from disclosure). Accordingly, with the exception of the information we have marked for release, the financial information you have marked in red, as well as the additional information we have marked, is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

You also assert section 552.117 of the Government Code. Section 552.117(a)(1) excepts from disclosure the current and former home addresses and telephone numbers, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body who request that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024. Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(1). Pursuant to section 552.117(a)(1), the city must withhold the personal information that pertains to a current or former employee of the city who elected, prior to the city's receipt of the request for information, to keep such information confidential. Whether a particular piece of information is public must be determined at the time the request for it is received by the governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). You

state that the employee whose information is at issue elected to keep her personal information confidential prior to the date on which the city received this request. Accordingly, the information you have marked in purple, as well as the additional information we have marked must be withheld pursuant to section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code.

You raise section 552.130 of the Government Code for portions of the submitted information. Section 552.130 excepts from disclosure information that "relates to . . . a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state [or] a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state." Gov't Code § 552.130. In accordance with section 552.130 of the Government Code, the city must withhold the Texas driver's license and motor vehicle record information that you have marked in green.

Finally, we note that the submitted documents contain information that is subject to section 552.136 of the Government Code.¹ Section 552.136 provides in relevant part:

(a) In this section, "access device" means a card, plate, code, account number, personal identification number, electronic serial number, mobile identification number, or other telecommunications service, equipment, or instrument identifier or means of account access that alone or in conjunction with another access device may be used to:

- (1) obtain money, goods, services, or another thing of value; or
- (2) initiate a transfer of funds other than a transfer originated solely by paper instrument.

(b) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential.

Gov't Code § 552.136. The city must withhold the bank account information that we have marked pursuant to section 552.136 of the Government Code.

In summary, the submitted I-9 and W-4 forms must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with federal law. In addition, the city must withhold the marked financial information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The city must withhold the information marked pursuant to section 552.117 of the Government Code, the marked Texas driver's license and motor

¹ The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception like section 552.136 on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. See Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

vehicle record information in accordance with section 552.130 of the Government Code, and the bank account information that we have marked pursuant to section 552.136 of the Government Code. The remaining submitted information must be released.

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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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).

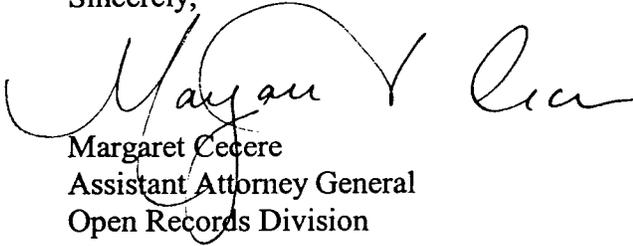
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

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 Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Margaret Cecere". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Margaret Cecere
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MC/sdk

Ref: ID# 245406

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Jonette Lingenfelder
City of Frisco
Human Resources
6891 Main Street
Frisco, Texas 75034
(w/o enclosures)