



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

May 23, 2006

Ms. Sharon Hicks  
City Attorney  
City of Abilene  
Post Office Box 60  
Abilene, Texas 79602-0060

OR2006-05412

Dear Ms. Hicks:

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# 249804.

The City of Abilene (the "city") received a request for all files and information pertaining to a specified address. You state that the city has released some of the requested information. You claim that the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We first address your claim that section 552.101 of the Government Code is applicable to portions of the submitted information. Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision. Gov't Code § 552.101. The informer's privilege, incorporated into the Act by section 552.101, has long been recognized by Texas courts. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969); *Hawthorne v. State*, 10 S.W.2d 724, 725 (Tex. Crim. App. 1928). This privilege protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority, provided that the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1988), 208 at 1-2 (1978). The informer's privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar law-enforcement agencies, as well as those who report violations of statutes with civil or

criminal penalties to "administrative officials having a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres." Open Records Decision No. 279 at 2 (1981) (citing Wigmore, Evidence, § 2374, at 767 (McNaughton rev. ed. 1961)). The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. See Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4-5 (1988). You state that the report was made to the city's Animal Services Department. You further state that the Animal Services Department "is the local law enforcement authority charged with enforcement of the Animal Noise code provision." Additionally, you inform us that the alleged offense "constitutes a Class C Misdemeanor punishable by a fine not to exceed \$500.00 pursuant to . . . the Code of the City of Abilene." Upon consideration of your arguments and review of the submitted information, we find that you have established that the information at issue may be redacted to protect the identity of the complainant. Accordingly, the city may withhold the complainant's name and identifying information pursuant to section 552.101 in conjunction with the informer's privilege.

Next, we address your claim that the remaining information at issue is excepted from public disclosure under section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code. Section 552.108 provides in part as follows:

(a) Information held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime is excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021 if:

(1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime;

(2) it is information that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime only in relation to an investigation that did not result in conviction or deferred adjudication[.]

Gov't Code § 552.108(a). Section 552.108 applies only to records created by an agency, or a portion of an agency, whose primary function is to investigate crimes and enforce criminal laws. See Open Records Decision Nos. 493 (1988), 287 (1981). Section 552.108 generally does not apply to records created by an agency whose chief function is essentially regulatory in nature. Open Records Decision No. 199 (1978). An agency that does not qualify as a law enforcement agency may, under certain limited circumstances, claim that section 552.108 protects records in its possession. See, e.g., Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision Nos. 493 (1988), 272 (1981). If an administrative agency's investigation reveals possible criminal conduct that the administrative agency intends to report or has already reported to the appropriate law enforcement agency, section 552.108 will apply to information gathered by the administrative agency if its release would interfere with law enforcement. See Gov't Code 552.108(a)(1), (b)(1); Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision Nos. 493 (1988), 272 (1981). You have neither explained to this office how the city's Animal Services Department is a law enforcement

agency for purposes of section 552.108, nor told us that the information at issue has been forwarded to an appropriate law enforcement agency. Therefore, we have no basis for ruling that the information may be withheld under section 552.108.

In summary, the city may withhold the complainant's name and identifying information pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the informer's privilege. The remaining information at issue must be released to the requestor.

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 black ink that reads "Shelli Egger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

Shelli Egger  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

SE/sdk

Ref: ID# 249804

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Katherine Hughes  
2350 Bishop Road #77  
Abilene, Texas 79606  
(w/o enclosures)