



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 21, 2006

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

OR2006-09568

Dear Ms. Joe:

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# 257388.

The Travis County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for "case number 05-160-93 and anything else that might be available" regarding a named individual. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, 552.130, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Section 552.101 encompasses the doctrine of common law privacy, which 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). To demonstrate the applicability of common law privacy, both prongs of this test must be satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. A compilation of an individual's criminal history is highly embarrassing information, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person. *Cf. United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (when considering prong regarding individual's privacy interest, court recognized distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of information and noted that individual has significant privacy interest in compilation of one's criminal history). Furthermore, we find that a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern

to the public. Here, because the requestor asks in part for “anything else that might be available” regarding a named individual, that portion of the request implicates the individual’s right to privacy. Therefore, to the extent the sheriff maintains law enforcement records depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the sheriff must withhold such information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common law privacy. However, the portion of the request asking for a specific case number does not implicate any individual’s right to privacy and we will address your arguments for this information. Additionally, you have submitted information in which the named individual is not depicted as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, and we will address your arguments for this information as well.

You also claim that case number 050016106 is protected by common law privacy. The type of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* included information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 683 (Tex. 1976). Upon review, we agree that case number 050016106 is subject to common law privacy and must be withheld in its entirety under section 552.101.

You claim that case number 050016093 is confidential under section 261.201(a) of the Family Code¹, which provides as follows:

(a) The following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

- (1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and
- (2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). Upon review, we determine that case number 050016093 consists of files, reports, records, communications, or working papers used or developed in an investigation under chapter 261. *See* Fam. Code § 261.001 (defining “abuse” and “neglect” for purposes of Family Code, ch. 261). Thus, this information is within the scope of section 261.201 of the Family Code. You do not inform us that the department has adopted any rules that govern the release of this type of information. Therefore, we assume that no

¹Section 552.101 encompasses section 261.201 of the Family Code.

such rules exist. Accordingly, we find that case number 050016093 is confidential pursuant to section 261.201 of the Family Code and must be withheld under section 552.101. *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (predecessor statute).

You claim that the remaining reports are excepted from disclosure under section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code, which excepts from disclosure information concerning an investigation that concluded in a result other than conviction or deferred adjudication. A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(2) must demonstrate that the requested information relates to a criminal investigation that has concluded in a final result other than a conviction or deferred adjudication. You state that the remaining reports pertain to cases that concluded in a result other than conviction or deferred adjudication. Therefore, we agree that section 552.108(a)(2) is applicable.

We note that section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle Publishing Co. 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), and includes a detailed description of the offense. *See* Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Thus, with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, you may withhold the remaining reports from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(2). However, we have marked a portion of the basic information in case number 060000938 that must be withheld under common law privacy. We note that you have the discretion to release all or part of the remaining information that is not otherwise confidential by law. Gov't Code § 552.007.

In summary, to the extent the sheriff maintains law enforcement records depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the sheriff must withhold such information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common law privacy. Case number 050016106 is subject to common law privacy and must be withheld in its entirety under section 552.101. Case number 050016093 is confidential pursuant to section 261.201 of the Family Code and must be withheld under section 552.101. With the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, you may withhold the remaining reports from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(2). However, we have marked a portion of the basic information in case number 060000938 that must be withheld under common law privacy. The remaining basic information must be released. As our ruling on this issue is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments.

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,



José Vela III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JV/krl

Ref: ID# 257388

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Barbara Walczak
3132 Chisholm Trail
Austin, Texas 78734
(w/o enclosures)