



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 6, 2006

Mr. Robert Hager
Nichols, Jackson, Dillard,
Hager & Smith, L.L.P.
1800 Lincoln Plaza
500 North Akard
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2006-10343

Dear Mr. Hager:

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# 258805.

The City of Rowlett (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to an ordinance violation notification letter sent to the requestor, including the identity of the person who made the associated complaint. You inform us that the city has released some requested information, but you claim that a portion of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. The Texas courts have recognized the informer's privilege. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969). It protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which a 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). The privilege excepts the informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect that informer's identity. Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990).

You state that a portion of the submitted information reveals the identity of an individual who reported to the city an alleged violation of section 22-81-22-87 of article II, division 3 of the Rowlett Environment Code, which pertains to junked vehicles. Our review of the submitted information indicates that a violation of section 22-81-22-87 is punishable by a civil penalty. You state that the complaint at issue was taken by a registered code enforcement officer of the city. Upon review of your arguments and the submitted information, we conclude that the city may withhold the identifying information of the individual who reported the alleged code violation at issue, which we have marked, under section 552.101 in conjunction with the informer's privilege. The remaining submitted information must be released.¹

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

¹ Because the records being released contain information relating to the requestor that would be excepted from disclosure to the general public to protect his privacy, the department must request another ruling from our office if it receives a future request for this information from an individual other than this requestor or his authorized representative. See Gov't Code § 552.023.

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,



Ramsey A. Abarca
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RAA/eb

Ref: ID# 258805

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Garry Wayne Bell
P. O. Box 433
Rowlett, Texas 75030
(w/o enclosures)