



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

This ruling has been modified by court action  
The ruling and judgment can be viewed in PDF  
format below.



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

January 22, 2008

Ms. Molly Shortall  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Arlington  
P.O. Box 90231  
Arlington, Texas 76004-3231

**The ruling you have requested has been amended as a result of litigation and has been attached to this document.**

OR2008-00975

Dear Ms. Shortall:

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# 300031.

The City of Arlington (the "city") received a request for "all 'Citizen's Action Request form' submissions since [January 1, 2005]." You state that a redacted copy of the requested information has been provided to the requestor. You claim that portions of the submitted information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.137 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." Gov't Code § 552.101. The informer's privilege, incorporated into the Act by section 552.101, has long been recognized by Texas courts. *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). It 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 (1998), 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); *see* 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 city states that portions of the submitted information may be withheld under the informer’s privilege. We have marked the identifying information of individuals who have reported violations of statutes with civil or criminal penalties. However, we conclude that you have failed to demonstrate the applicability of the informer’s privilege to the remaining information. Therefore, the remaining information may not be withheld under section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer’s privilege.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code 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.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the city must withhold the Texas motor vehicle record information we have marked under section 552.130.

Section 552.136(b) of the Government Code states that “[n]otwithstanding 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. Thus, the city must withhold the information that we have marked under section 552.136.

Section 552.137 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body” unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c). *See* Gov’t Code § 552.137(a)-(c). Section 552.137 does not apply to a government employee’s work email address because such an address is not that of the employee as a “member of the public,” but is instead the address of the individual as a government employee. The e-mail addresses do not appear to be of a type specifically excluded by section 552.137(c). Therefore, unless the individuals whose e-mail addresses are at issue consented to release of their e-mail addresses, the city must withhold most of the information you have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code. However, some of the marked e-mail addresses are governmental e-mail addresses that are not excepted under section 552.137. We have marked the e-mail addresses the city must release.

In summary, the city may withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 in conjunction with the informer’s privilege. The city also must withhold the information

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<sup>1</sup>The Office of the Attorney General will raise mandatory exceptions on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

we have marked under sections 552.130 and 552.136 of the Government Code. With the exception of the e-mail addresses we have marked for release, the city must withhold the e-mail addresses that you have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code. The remaining 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 file suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, 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 challenge 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,



Loan Hong-Turney  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

LH/eeg

Ref: ID# 300031

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Joseph Farah  
7005 Lake Whitney Drive  
Arlington, Texas 76002  
(w/o enclosures)



of citizen Code Violation informers listed in the complaint log entry and the corresponding information on those complaint entries in which there was noted an alleged violation of an ordinance, code, or law, is excepted from disclosure pursuant to Tex. Gov't Code § 552.101 and the informer's privilege.

2. The City may withhold from the requestor the information described in Paragraph 1 of this Judgment.

3. If it has not already done so, the City must disclose any remaining responsive information to requestor promptly upon receipt of this final judgment signed by the Court.

4. All costs of court are taxed against the parties incurring the same;

5. All relief not expressly granted is denied; and

6. This Agreed Final Judgment finally disposes of all claims between Plaintiff and Defendant and is a final judgment.

SIGNED this the 17 day of November, 2011.

APPROVED:

*Pamela D. Hutson*

PAMELA D. HUTSON  
State Bar No. 11955425  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Arlington  
City Attorney's Office  
P.O. Box 90231, Mail Stop 63-0300  
Arlington, Texas 76004-3231  
Telephone: (817) 459-6878  
Facsimile: (817) 459-6897

ATTORNEY FOR PLAINTIFF

*Maria D. Nave*  
PRESIDING JUDGE

*Laura E. Miles Valdez*

LAURA E. MILES VALDEZ  
State Bar No. 24035551  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Litigation  
Environmental Protection and  
Administrative Law Division  
P.O. Box 12548, Capitol Station  
Austin, Texas 78711-2548  
Telephone: (512) 475-4151  
Facsimile: (512) 320-0167

ATTORNEY FOR DEFENDANT