



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 19, 2008

Ms. Tamma Willis
McLennan County Sheriff's Office
219 North 6th Street
Waco, Texas 76701

OR2008-05780A

Dear Ms. Willis:

This office issued Open Records Letter No. 2008-05780 (2008) on April 29, 2008. We have examined this ruling and determined that we made an error. Where this office determines that an error was made in the decision process under sections 552.301 and 552.306, and that error resulted in an incorrect decision, we will correct the previously issued ruling. Consequently, this decision serves as the correct ruling and is a substitute for the decision issued on April 29, 2008. *See generally* Gov't Code 552.011 (providing that Office of Attorney General may issue decision to maintain uniformity in application, operation, and interpretation of Public Information Act (the "Act")).

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 308542.

The McLennan County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for all records pertaining to two named individuals and a specified address. You claim that the requested 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 representative sample of information.¹

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

¹We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

(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. U.S. 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. The present request requires the sheriff to compile unspecified police records concerning two named individuals. Accordingly, we find the request implicates these individuals' right to privacy. Therefore, to the extent the sheriff maintains unspecified law enforcement records depicting the named individuals as suspects, arrestees, or criminal defendants, the sheriff must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

We note that you have submitted an incident report, number 08-0024, in which neither of the named individuals are listed as suspects, arrestees, or criminal defendants. Report number 08-0024 is not protected by common-law privacy and may not be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis.

You also raise section 552.108 of the Government Code. Section 552.108(a)(1) excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime [if] release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime." Gov't Code § 552.101. A governmental body claiming section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.108(a)(1), 301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). Upon review, we find that you have failed to identify how report number 08-0024 relates to a pending investigation or prosecution or explain how release of any portion of report number 08-0024 would interfere with a particular criminal investigation or prosecution. Thus, you have not established that section 552.108(a)(1) applies to report number 08-0024. Therefore, report number 08-0024 may not be withheld under this exception.

In summary, to the extent the sheriff maintains law enforcement records depicting the named individuals as suspects, arrestees, or criminal defendants, the sheriff must withhold those records under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The remaining requested 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).

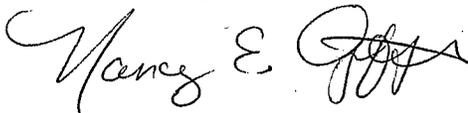
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records 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,



Nancy E. Griffiths
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

NEG/jb

Ms. Tamma Willis - Page 4

Ref: ID# 308542

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. P. James Rainey
Rainey & Rainey, L.P.
2900 West Waco Drive
Waco, Texas 76710
(w/o enclosures)