



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 21, 2009

Mr. Bill Delmore
Assistant District Attorney
Montgomery County
207 West Phillips, 2nd Floor
Conroe, Texas 77301

OR2009-13248

Dear Mr. Delmore:

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# 355806.

The Montgomery County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney") received a request for any patrol unit video recordings of a specified incident. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, and 552.119 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 public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception 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 demonstrated. *Id.* at 681-82. 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. *Id.* at 683. A compilation of an

individual's criminal history is also 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. However, an individual's current involvement in the criminal justice system, including active warrant information, does not constitute criminal history information for the purposes of section 552.101. Upon review, we find none of the submitted information is intimate or embarrassing, and of no legitimate public concern. Therefore, the district attorney may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

(b) For purposes of this section, the state or a political subdivision is considered to be a party to litigation of a criminal nature until the applicable statute of limitations has expired or until the defendant has exhausted all appellate and postconviction remedies in state and federal court.

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Gov't Code § 552.103. A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show that the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). A governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). You inform us that the submitted information relates to an incident in which an individual was arrested for a misdemeanor, to which the individual pled guilty. However, you assert that the individual at issue has not exhausted "all appellate and post conviction remedies." We note that, in the Trial Court's Certification of Defendant's Right of Appeal, the individual at issue acknowledges that the case at issue was "a plea-bargain case, and the defendant has NO right of appeal." Therefore, we find that the district attorney has failed to show that litigation was reasonably anticipated on the date it received the present request for information. Consequently, the district attorney may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

Section 552.119 of the Government Code provides the following:

(a) A photograph that depicts a peace officer as defined by Article 2.12, Code of Criminal Procedure, the release of which would endanger the life or physical safety of the officer, is excepted from [required public disclosure] unless:

- (1) the officer is under indictment or charged with an offense by information;
- (2) the officer is a party in a civil service hearing or a case in arbitration; or
- (3) the photograph is introduced as evidence in a judicial proceeding.

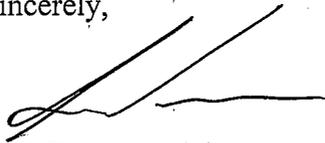
(b) A photograph excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) may be made public only if the peace officer gives written consent to the disclosure.

Gov't Code § 552.119. Under section 552.119, a governmental body must demonstrate, if the documents do not demonstrate on their face, that release of the photograph would endanger the life or physical safety of a peace officer. You argue that because the arrested individual is a popular political figure, his arrest is "seen in a bad light" by some people in the community. You assert that these people "may seek retribution" against the officer depicted in the video recording. After review of your arguments, however, we find you have not demonstrated, and it is not apparent from our review of the submitted information, that release of the images of the officer in the submitted video recording would endanger the life or physical safety of the peace officer depicted; therefore the district attorney may not withhold the images of the officer under section 552.119 of the Government Code. As you raise no further exceptions to disclosure, the submitted information must be released to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Ana Carolina Vieira
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ACV/eeg

Ref: ID# 355806

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)