



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 3, 2009

Ms. Jenny Gravley
Taylor Olson Adkins Sralla Elam L.L.P.
6000 Western Place Suite 200
I-30 at Bryant-Irvin Road
Fort Worth, Texas 76107-4654

OR2009-15623

Dear Ms. Gravley:

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# 360311.

The City of Southlake (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for information relating to a water conservation notice involving a specified address. You indicate that some of the requested information has been released. You claim that other responsive information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the information you submitted.

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. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege, which Texas courts have long recognized. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969). The informer's privilege protects 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. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1998), 208 at 1-2 (1978)*. The 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." *See Open Records Decision No. 279 at 2 (1981) (citing Wigmore, Evidence, § 2374, at 767 (McNaughton rev.*

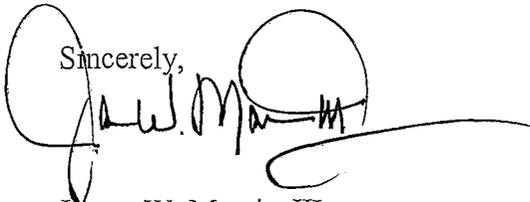
ed. 1961)). The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4-5 (1988). The privilege excepts the informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect the informer's identity. *See* Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990).

You have highlighted the information that the city seeks to withhold. You state that the highlighted information identifies an individual who reported a potential violation of city ordinances relating to water conservation. You explain that a violation of the code provisions involved is punishable by a fine of as much as \$2,000.00 for each offense. You inform us that the city's Department of Public Safety, to which the potential violation was reported, and the city's Code Enforcement Department are responsible for enforcing city ordinances. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we conclude that the highlighted information is protected by the common-law informer's privilege and may be withheld on that basis under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James W. Morris, III', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/cc

Ref: ID# 360311

Enc: Submitted document

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)