



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 17, 2010

Ms. Tamma Willis
McLennan County Sheriff's Office
901 Washington Avenue
Waco, Texas 76701

OR2010-08887

Dear Ms. Willis:

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#383259.

The McLennan County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for information, including the police statement associated with case #10-0289. You claim that the submitted 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 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. Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides in part:

(a) Except as provided by Section 261.203, the following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

(1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and

(2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

...

(k) Notwithstanding Subsection (a), an investigating agency, other than the [Texas Department of Family and Protective Services] or the Texas Youth Commission, on request, shall provide to the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of a child who is the subject of reported abuse or neglect, or to the child if the child is at least 18 years of age, information concerning the reported abuse or neglect that would otherwise be confidential under this section. The investigating agency shall withhold information under this subsection if the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of the child requesting the information is alleged to have committed the abuse or neglect.

(l) Before a child or a parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of a child may inspect or copy a record or file concerning the child under Subsection (k), the custodian of the record or file must redact:

(2) any information that is excepted from required disclosure under [the Act], or other law; and

(3) the identity of the person who made the report.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a), (k), (l). You claim the submitted information pertains to an investigation of child abuse. Upon review, we agree that the information in question was used or developed in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse under chapter 261 of the Family Code, so as to fall within the scope of section 261.201(a). *See id.* § 261.001(1)(A) (defining abuse for purposes of Fam. Code ch. 261); *see also id.* § 101.003(a) (defining “child” for purposes of this section as person under 18 years of age who is not and has not been married or who has not had the disabilities of minority removed for general purposes). We note, however, the requestor is the parent of the child victim listed in the report, and the parent is not alleged to have committed the suspected abuse. Thus, in this instance, section 261.201(a) may not be used to withhold the submitted report from this requestor. *Id.* § 261.201(k). We note that section 261.201(l)(3) provides that before a parent can copy and inspect a record of a child under 261.201(k), the identity of the party who made

the report must be redacted. *Id.* § 261.201(1)(3). Accordingly, the sheriff must withhold the reporting party's identity under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 261.201(1)(3). However, we also note that section 261.201(1)(2) states any information that is excepted from required disclosure under the Act or other law may still be withheld from disclosure. *Id.* § 261.201(1)(2). Accordingly, we will address your argument under section 552.108 of the Government Code.

Section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if: (1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime." Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a) must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A) (governmental body must provide comments explaining why exceptions raised should apply to information requested); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that the information at issue relates to a pending criminal prosecution. Based on your representation and our review, we conclude that section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the submitted information.

Section 552.108 does not except from required public disclosure "basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime." Gov't Code § 552.108(c). The sheriff must release the types of basic information listed in *Houston Chronicle Publishing Company v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, with the exception of basic information, the sheriff may withhold the submitted information pursuant to section 552.108 of the Government Code. However, in releasing the basic information, the sheriff must withhold the reporting party's identifying information pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(1)(3) of the Family Code.¹

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_ori.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

¹We note that the requestor has a special right of access to the information being released in this instance. Because such information is confidential with respect to the general public, if the sheriff receives another request for this information from a different requestor, the sheriff must again seek a ruling from this office.

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 'V Burgess', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Vanessa Burgess
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

VB/jb

Ref: ID#383259

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)