



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 1, 2013

Mr. Richard L. Bilbie
Assistant City Attorney
City of Harlingen
P.O. Box 2207
Harlingen, Texas 78551-2207

OR2013-11186

Dear Mr. Bilbie:

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# 492019.

The Harlingen Police Department (the "department") received a request for all criminal records pertaining to a named individual. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim.

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 section 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), *cert. denied*, 430 U.S. 931 (1977). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both prongs of this test must be satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. This office has found 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. United States 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 a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public.

In this instance, the requestor seeks access to unspecified law enforcement records relating to the named individual. Thus, we agree this request requires the department to compile the named individual's criminal history and thereby implicates the individual's right to privacy. Accordingly, to the extent the department maintains any information that depicts the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the department must generally withhold any such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

We note the requestor is an employee of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services ("DFPS"). Section 411.114 of the Government Code states in pertinent part:

(a)(2) The [DFPS] shall obtain from the [Department of Public Safety ("DPS")] criminal history record information ["CHRI"] maintained by the [DPS] that relates to a person who is:

...

(I) an alleged perpetrator in a report the [DFPS] receives alleging that the person has abused, neglected, or exploited a child, an elderly person, or a person with a disability, provided that:

(i) the report alleges the person has engaged in conduct that meets the applicable definition of abuse, neglect, or exploitation under Chapter 261, Family Code, or Chapter 48, Human Resources Code; and

(ii) the person is not also the victim of the alleged conduct[.]

...

(4) Subject to Section 411.087, the [DFPS] is entitled to:

...

(B) obtain from any other criminal justice agency in this state [CHRI] maintained by that criminal justice agency that relates to a person described by Subdivision (2) or (3).

Gov't Code § 411.114(a)(2)(I), (4)(B). CHRI consists of "information collected about a person by a criminal justice agency that consists of identifiable descriptions and notations of arrests, detentions, indictments, informations, and other formal criminal charges and their dispositions." *See id.* § 411.082(2). Thus, this requestor has a right of access under section 411.114 to CHRI in information held by the department if it involves an alleged perpetrator in a report of child abuse or neglect. In this case, the DFPS employee does not state the named individual is the alleged perpetrator in a report of abuse or neglect of a child, but only requests information about the named individual. Therefore, to the extent the named individual is an alleged perpetrator in a report of child abuse or neglect that was reported to DFPS, the department must release the type of allegation made and whether there was an arrest, information, indictment, detention, conviction, or other formal charges and their dispositions from any responsive information depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant. *See Collins v. Tex Mall, L.P.*, 297 S.W.3d 409, 415 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2009, no pet.) (statutory provision controls and preempts common law only when statute directly conflicts with common law principle); *CenterPoint Energy Houston Elec. LLC v. Harris County Toll Rd.*, 436 F.3d 541, 544 (5th Cir. 2006) (common law controls only where there is no conflicting or controlling statutory law). To the extent it exists, any remaining information depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant must be withheld under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey W. Giles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWG/dls

Ref: ID# 492019

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)