



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 24, 2014

Ms. Sherri Russell
Office of the City Attorney
City of Lake Jackson
5B Oak Drive
Lake Jackson, Texas 77566-5289

OR2014-04871

Dear Ms. Russell:

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# 519101 (PIR# W001227-012814).

The Lake Jackson Police Department (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You claim 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 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."¹ Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides in pertinent part:

(a) [T]he following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under [the Act] 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:

¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception like section 552.101 on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

(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)(2)-(3). Upon review, we find the submitted information was used or developed by the department in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse. *See id.* § 261.001(1) (defining “abuse” for purposes of chapter 261 of the Family Code). Accordingly, we conclude this information is within the scope of section 261.201(a). We note, however, the requestor is a parent of the alleged child victim at issue. Furthermore, the requestor is not the individual alleged to have committed the abuse. Therefore, the department may not withhold the submitted information from the requestor under section 261.201(a) of the Family Code. *See* Fam. Code § 261.201(k). However, before the department provides any of this information to the requestor, the department must redact the identity of the person who made the report pursuant to section 261.201(l)(3). *Id.* § 261.201(l)(3). In addition, the department must redact any information that is otherwise

excepted from required disclosure under the Act pursuant to section 261.201(1)(2). *Id.* § 261.201(1)(2). As you raise section 552.108 of the Government Code for the submitted information, we will consider the applicability of that section to this information.

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 . . . 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 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); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state the submitted information relates to a pending criminal investigation. Based on your representation and our review, we find the release of the information at issue would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ’g Co. v. Department of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases), *writ ref’d n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the submitted information.

However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure “basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime.” Gov’t Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle Publishing Co. 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). *See* Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information made public by *Houston Chronicle*). We note basic information includes the identity and description of the complainant. *See id.* In this instance, the complainant is also the reporting party. As noted above, section 261.201(1)(3) of the Family Code provides that the identity of the person who made the report must be redacted. Fam. Code § 261.201(1)(3). Thus, with the exception of basic information, the department may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. However, in releasing basic information, the department must withhold the reporting party’s identifying information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(1)(3) of the Family Code.²

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.

²We note this requestor has a special right of access under section 261.201(k) of the Family Code to the information being released. Therefore, if the department receives another request for this information from a different requestor, the department must again seek a ruling from this office.

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 that reads "Tamara H. Holland". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T".

Tamara H. Holland
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

THH/bhf

Ref: ID# 519101

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)