



January 8, 2015

Ms. Susan Fillion  
Assistant County Attorney  
Harris County Sheriff's Office  
1200 Baker Street, 2nd Floor  
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2015-00371

Dear Ms. Fillion:

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# 549560 (HCSO File No. 14SO600251).

The Harris County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for all incident reports pertaining to five specified addresses, four named individuals, and the requestor. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision."<sup>2</sup> Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information if it (1) contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts, the

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<sup>1</sup>We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore, does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

<sup>2</sup>The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) 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 met. *Id.* at 681-82. 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. U.S. Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (finding significant privacy interest in compilation of individual's criminal history by recognizing distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of criminal history information). Furthermore, we find a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public.

The request, in part, requires the sheriff's office to compile unspecified law enforcement records concerning the named individuals. We find such a request for unspecified law enforcement records implicates the individuals' rights to privacy. Therefore, to the extent the sheriff's office maintains law enforcement records depicting the named individuals as suspects, arrestees, or criminal defendants, the sheriff's office must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, information that refers to an individual solely as a victim, witness, or involved person is not private and may not be withheld under section 552.101 on that basis. We note you have submitted information that does not list any of the named individuals as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant. This information does not constitute part of a criminal history compilation and may not be withheld on that basis.

Section 552.108(a)(2) 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 . . . it is information that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime only in relation to an investigation that did not result in conviction or deferred adjudication[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(2). Section 552.108(a)(2) is applicable only if the information at issue relates to a concluded criminal case that did not result in a conviction or deferred adjudication. A governmental body that claims an exception to disclosure under section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why this exception is applicable to the information the governmental body seeks to withhold. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A). You state incident report number 12-100279 pertains to a concluded criminal investigation that did not result in a conviction or deferred adjudication. Based on your representations and our review, we agree section 552.108(a)(2) is applicable to the information at issue.

Section 552.108, however, does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. *Id.* § 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 (1976) (summarizing types

of information considered to be basic information). Thus, with the exception of basic information, the sheriff's office may withhold incident report number 12-100279 under section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code.

In summary, to the extent the sheriff's office maintains law enforcement records depicting the named individuals as suspects, arrestees, or criminal defendants, the sheriff's office must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. With the exception of basic information, the sheriff's office may withhold incident report number 12-100279 under section 552.108(a)(2) 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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl\\_ruling\\_info.shtml](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,



Leah B. Wingerson  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

LBW/bhf

Ref: ID# 549560

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)