



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 10, 2015

Mr. Jon Thatcher
Assistant District Attorney
Rockwall County
1111 East Yellow Jacket Lane, Suite 201
Rockwall, Texas 75087

OR2015-18891

Dear Mr. Thatcher:

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# 584685.

The Rockwall County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney's office") received a request for information regarding a criminal charge made against a teacher involving a named individual. You state the district attorney's office will redact social security numbers pursuant to section 552.147(b) of the Government Code.¹ 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 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."² Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. Section 261.201 of the Family Code provides, in relevant part, as follows:

¹Section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact the social security number of a living person without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act. *See* Gov't Code § 552.147(b).

²The 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).

(a) [T]he 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)(2)-(3). The submitted information relates to an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse. *See id.* § 261.001(1) (defining “abuse” for purposes of Family Code chapter 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 disabilities of minority removed for general purposes). Accordingly, we find this information is subject to chapter 261 of the Family Code. We note the requestor’s

client is a parent of the child victim listed in the information, and is not alleged to have committed the abuse. Thus, pursuant to section 261.201(k), the information at issue may not be withheld from this requestor under section 552.101 of the Government Code on the basis of section 261.201(a). *See id.* § 261.201(k). However, section 261.201(1)(3) states the identity of the reporting party shall be withheld from disclosure. *Id.* § 261.201(1)(3). Further, section 261.201(1)(2) states any information that is excepted from required disclosure under the Act or other law must still be withheld from disclosure. *Id.* § 261.201(1)(2). Accordingly, we will consider your argument against disclosure of the submitted 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(a)(1) 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 pertains to a criminal case that is still pending. Based on your representation, we conclude the release of the information at issue would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ’g Co. v. City 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, we note 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*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). We note basic information includes the identity of the complainant. *See* ORD 127 at 3-4. Thus, with the exception of the basic information, the district attorney’s office may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. As noted above, section 261.201(1)(3) states the identity of the reporting party shall be withheld from disclosure. Fam. Code § 261.201(1)(3). Accordingly, in releasing the basic information, the district attorney’s office must withhold the identity of the reporting party, which we have marked, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(1)(3) of the Family Code.

In summary, with the exception of the basic information, the department may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. In releasing the basic information, the department must withhold the identity of the reporting party under

section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(1)(3) of the Family Code.³

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,



Britni Fabian
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BF/bhf

Ref: ID# 584685

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

³We note the requestor has a special right of access to some of the basic information. *See* Fam. Code § 261.201(k). Because such information is confidential with respect to the general public, if the district attorney's office receives another request for this information from a different requestor, the district attorney's office must again seek a ruling from this office.