



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 23, 2015

Ms. Nneka E. Kanu
Assistant City Attorney
Legal Department
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2015-24590

Dear Ms. Kanu:

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# 594254 (GC No. 22757).

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for twelve categories of information regarding a specified case. You state the city will release some information. You claim some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 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." Gov't Code § 552.101. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege, which Texas courts have long recognized. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969). The informer's privilege protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority, provided the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. *See Open Records Decision No. 208 at 1-2 (1978)*. The informer's privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar law-enforcement agencies, as well as those who report violations of statutes with civil or criminal penalties to "administrative officials having a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres." *Open Records Decision No. 279 at 1-2 (1981) (citing 8 John H. Wigmore, Evidence in Trials at Common Law, § 2374, at 767 (J. McNaughton Rev. Ed. 1961))*. The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4 (1988)*.

However, individuals who provide information in the course of an investigation but do not make the initial report of the violation are not informants for the purposes of claiming the informer's privilege. The privilege excepts the informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect that informer's identity. Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990).

You state portions of the submitted information identify a complainant who reported a violation of sections 39-65 and 39-77 of the city's code of ordinances to 311, which then forwarded the complaints to the city's Department of Neighborhoods (the "department"). You explain the department is responsible for enforcing the relevant city ordinances. You also state such violations of the relevant city ordinances are punishable by criminal penalties. You state the subject of the complaints does not already know the identity of the informer. Based upon your representations and our review, we conclude the city has demonstrated the applicability of the common-law informer's privilege to the information at issue, which you have marked. Therefore, the city may withhold the marked information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege.

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 Ramirez
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BR/bhf

Ref: ID# 594254

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)