



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 28, 2016

Ms. Laura Anne Coats
Assistant District Attorney
County of Dallas
133 North Riverfront Boulevard, LB-19
Dallas, Texas 75207-4399

OR2016-06816

Dear Ms. Coats:

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# 602861.

The Dallas County Criminal District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney's office") received a request for twenty-one categories of information pertaining to a motor vehicle accident involving the requestor's clients. The district attorney's office claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.108, and 552.130 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions the district attorney's office claims and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the district attorney's office has only submitted information responsive to some of the categories of information requested. We assume, to the extent any information responsive to the remaining categories existed on the date the district attorney's office received the request, the district attorney's office has released it. If the district attorney's office has not released any such information, it must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.006, .301, .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible).

¹Although the district attorney's office also raises section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 552.130 of the Government Code, this office has concluded section 552.101 does not encompass other exceptions found in the Act. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 at 1-2 (2002).

Section 552.108 of the Government Code states, in pertinent part, the following:

(a) Information held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime [is excepted from required public disclosure] if:

(1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime; [or]

...

(4) it is information that:

(A) is prepared by an attorney representing the state in anticipation of or in the course of preparing for criminal litigation; or

(B) reflects the mental impressions or legal reasoning of an attorney representing the state.

...

(b) An internal record or notation of a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that is maintained for internal use in matters relating to law enforcement or prosecution is excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021 if:

(1) release of the internal record or notation would interfere with law enforcement or prosecution;

...

(3) the internal record or notation:

(A) is prepared by an attorney representing the state in anticipation of or in the course of preparing for criminal litigation; or

(B) reflects the mental impressions or legal reasoning of an attorney representing the state.

Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1), (a)(4), (b)(1), (b)(3). A governmental body claiming subsections 552.108(a)(1) and 552.108(b)(1) must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), (b)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). The district attorney's office states the submitted information pertains to a

pending criminal prosecution. We note, however, the information at issue includes a DIC-24 Statutory Warning and a DIC-25 Notice of Suspension. Because copies of these documents were provided to the arrestee, we find the district attorney's office has not demonstrated the release of these forms, which we have marked, will interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. The district attorney's office further has not demonstrated how release of these forms would interfere with law enforcement or prosecution. Accordingly, the DIC-24 and DIC-25 forms may not be withheld under subsection 552.108(a)(1) or subsection 552.108(b)(1). However, based on the district attorney's office's representation and our review of the information at issue, we conclude the release of the remaining information 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, subsection 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code is applicable.

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*. See 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Accordingly, with the exception of the DIC-24 and DIC-25 forms and basic information, the district attorney's office may withhold the submitted information under subsection 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.²

We understand the district attorney's office to argue the DIC-24 and DIC-25 forms are subject to subsections 552.108(a)(4) and 552.108(b)(3) of the Government Code in conjunction with *Curry v. Walker*, 873 S.W.2d 379 (Tex. 1994), as a request for the entire prosecution file. In *Curry*, the Texas Supreme Court held that a request for a district attorney's "entire litigation file" was "too broad" and, quoting *National Union Fire Insurance Co. v. Valdez*, 863 S.W.2d 458 (Tex. 1993) held, "the decision as to what to include in [the file] necessarily reveals the attorney's thought processes concerning the prosecution or defense of the case." *Curry*, 873 S.W.2d at 380 (internal quotations omitted). The district attorney's office contends the instant request for information seeks the district attorney's office's entire prosecution file for the case at issue. We disagree the requestor seeks the entire prosecution file. Rather, the requestor seeks specific information held by the district attorney's office. Such a request does not constitute a request for the "entire" file. Thus, we conclude the present request is not a request for the district attorney's entire prosecution file. As a result, the district attorney's office may not withhold the DIC-24 and DIC-25 forms under subsections 552.108(a)(4) and 552.108(b)(3) of the Government Code and the holding in *Curry*.

²As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

Next, we address the district attorney's office's argument under section 552.103 of the Government Code. Section 552.103 provides:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

...

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Gov't Code § 552.103(a), (c). The governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, orig. proceeding); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). The governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

We note the purpose of section 552.103 is to enable a governmental body to protect its position in litigation by forcing parties to obtain information related to litigation through the discovery process. *See* ORD 551 at 4-5. Thus, any information obtained from or provided to all other parties in the anticipated or pending litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a) and must be disclosed. The submitted DIC-24 and DIC-25 forms were provided to the arrestee; thus, the DIC-24 and DIC-25 forms were inevitably seen by the opposing party to the litigation. Furthermore, basic information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle* is generally not excepted from public disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. Open Records Decision No. 597 (1991). Therefore, the district attorney's office may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code provides information relating to a motor vehicle operator's license, driver's license, motor vehicle title or registration, or personal identification document issued by an agency of this state or another state or country is excepted from public release. *See* Gov't Code § 552.130. Accordingly, the district attorney's office must withhold the motor vehicle record information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. However, we find none of the remaining

information consists of motor vehicle record information subject to section 552.130. Accordingly, none of the remaining information may be withheld under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” *Id.* § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). Under the common-law right of privacy, an individual has a right to be free from the publicizing of private affairs in which the public has no legitimate concern. *Id.* at 682. In considering whether a public citizen’s date of birth is private, the Third Court of Appeals looked to the supreme court’s rationale in *Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts v. Attorney General of Texas*, 354 S.W.3d 336 (Tex. 2010). *Paxton v. City of Dallas*, No. 03-13-00546-CV, 2015 WL 3394061, at *3 (Tex. App.—Austin May 22, 2015, pet. denied) (mem. op.). The supreme court concluded public employees’ dates of birth are private under section 552.102 of the Government Code because the employees’ privacy interest substantially outweighed the negligible public interest in disclosure.³ *Texas Comptroller*, 354 S.W.3d at 347-48. Based on *Texas Comptroller*, the court of appeals concluded the privacy rights of public employees apply equally to public citizens, and thus, public citizens’ dates of birth are also protected by common-law privacy pursuant to section 552.101. *City of Dallas*, 2015 WL 3394061, at *3. Accordingly, the district attorney’s office must withhold the date of birth we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, none of the remaining information is highly intimate or embarrassing and of no legitimate public interest and thus, none of it may be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of constitutional privacy, which consists of two interrelated types of privacy: (1) the right to make certain kinds of decisions independently and (2) an individual’s interest in avoiding disclosure of personal matters. *See* Open Records Decision No. 455 at 4 (1987). The first type protects an individual’s autonomy within “zones of privacy,” which include matters related to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relationships, and child rearing and education. *Id.* The second type of constitutional privacy requires a balancing between the individual’s privacy interests and the public’s need to know information of public concern. *Id.* The scope of information protected is narrower than that under the common-law doctrine of privacy; the information must concern the “most intimate aspects of human affairs.” *Id.* at 5 (citing *Ramie v. City of Hedwig Village, Texas*, 765 F.2d 490 (5thCir. 1985)). Upon review, we find the district attorney’s office has failed to demonstrate any of the remaining information falls within the zones of privacy or implicates an individual’s privacy interests for purposes of constitutional privacy. Therefore, the district attorney’s office may not withhold any of the

³Section 552.102(a) excepts from disclosure “information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” Gov’t Code § 552.102(a).

remaining information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with constitutional privacy.

In summary, with the exception of the DIC-24 and DIC-25 forms and basic information, which must be released, the district attorney's office may withhold the submitted information under subsection 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. In releasing the DIC-24 and DIC-25 forms, the district attorney's office must withhold the motor vehicle record information we marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code and the date of birth we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code 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,



Rahat Huq
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RSH/som

Ref: ID# 602861

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)