



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

April 22, 2016

Ms. Heather Silver
Assistant City Attorney
City of Dallas
1500 Marilla, Room 7DN
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2016-09026

Dear Ms. Silver:

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# 613267.

The City of Dallas (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to a series of complaints regarding animals. You claim some of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code and privileged under Texas Rule of Evidence 508. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

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

¹We 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 that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

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, witnesses who provide information in the course of an investigation but do not make a 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 that the informants at issue reported alleged violations of section 7-7.4 of the city’s code to the city’s 3-1-1 call center. You state the complaints were referred to the city’s Code Compliance Department, which you explain has the authority to enforce the provision of the code at issue. You also state that the alleged violation is a Class C misdemeanor punishable by a fine. Upon review, we find that with the exception of information we have marked, the city may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer’s privilege. However, we find you have failed to demonstrate the applicability of the informer’s privilege to the remaining information you have marked. Thus the city may not withhold this information, which we have marked for release, under section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer’s privilege.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.

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,



Jesse Harvey
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JH/eb

²As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure.

Ref: ID# 613267

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)