



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 11, 2016

Ms. Josette Flores
Assistant City Attorney
City of El Paso
P.O. Box 1890
El Paso, Texas 79950-1890

OR2016-10759

Dear Ms. Flores:

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# 609961 (ORR# 16-1005-1292).

The City of El Paso (the "city") received a request for animal control complaints for a specified address. 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. *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, 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). We note the informer's privilege does not apply where the informant's identity is known to the individual who is the subject of the complaint. *See* ORD 208 at 1-2.

You state the submitted information identifies complainants who reported violations of city ordinances to the city's animal control personnel, who are responsible for enforcing the relevant portions of the city ordinances. You also state violations of the relevant city ordinances carry civil or criminal penalties. 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 we have marked. Therefore, the city may withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. However, we find the subjects of the remaining complaints are aware of the identities of the complainants. Thus, you have failed to demonstrate the applicability of the common-law informer's privilege to any of the remaining information at issue, and the city may not withhold it under section 552.101 on that basis. The city must release the remaining information.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Meredith L. Coffman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Meredith L. Coffman
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MLC/bw

Ref: ID# 609961

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)