



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 25, 2016

Mr. Vance Hinds
Assistant County & District Attorney
Ellis County & District Attorney's Office
109 South Jackson
Waxahachie, Texas 75165

OR2016-11970

Dear Mr. Vance:

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# 611760.

The Ellis County Sheriff's Department (the "department") received a request for all records concerning a named individual during a specified time period, including two incidents occurring on specified dates. We understand you redacted certain information pursuant to section 552.147(b) of the Government Code.¹ You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code.² We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the requestor seeks all records concerning a named individual during a specified time period. A portion of the submitted information does not fall within the specified time period. Thus, the information we marked is not responsive to the present

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

²Although you also raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with constitutional privacy for the submitted information, you provide no arguments explaining how this doctrine applies to the information at issue. Therefore, we assume you no longer assert this doctrine. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302.

request. This ruling does not address the public availability of information that is not responsive to the request, and the department is not required to release that information in response to the request.³

Next, we must address the department's procedural obligations under the Act. Section 552.301 describes the procedural obligations placed on a governmental body that receives a written request for information it wishes to withhold. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), the governmental body must ask for the attorney general's decision and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days after receiving the request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). In this instance, you state, and submit documentation demonstrating, the department received the request for information on February 29, 2016. Accordingly, the department's ten-business-day deadline was March 14, 2016. However, you did not request a ruling from this office until March 17, 2016. *See id.* § 552.308 (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail). Consequently, we find the department failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 in requesting this decision from our office.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption the requested information is public and must be released unless a compelling reason exists to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342, 350 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to section 552.302); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Generally, a compelling reason to withhold information exists where some other source of law makes the information confidential or where third party interests are at stake. Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977). Because sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code can provide compelling reasons to withhold information, we will consider the applicability of these exceptions to the responsive 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. Section 552.101 encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information that (1) contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both prongs of this test must be satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. Types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court are delineated in *Industrial Foundation. Id.*

³As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your arguments against disclosure of this information.

at 683. A compilation of an individual's criminal history is highly embarrassing information, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person. *Cf. U.S. Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (when considering prong regarding individual's privacy interest, court recognized distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of information and noted that individual has significant privacy interest in compilation of one's criminal history). Furthermore, we find a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public. Upon review, we find the present request, in part, requires the department to compile unspecified law enforcement records concerning the named individual. Accordingly, we find the request implicates the named individual's right to privacy. Therefore, to the extent the department maintains law enforcement records depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee or criminal defendant, the department must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. We note, however, the department has submitted documents relating to incidents specified by the requestor. We find this information does not implicate the privacy interests of the named individual. This information is not part of a compilation of the named individual's criminal history, and the department may not withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy on that basis. Accordingly, we will address the department's arguments against disclosure of this information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses information protected by chapter 411 of the Government Code, which makes confidential criminal history record information ("CHRI") generated by the National Crime Information Center or by the Texas Crime Information Center. *See* Gov't Code § 411.083(a). Title 28, part 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations governs the release of CHRI that states obtain from the federal government or other states. Open Records Decision No. 565 (1990). The federal regulations allow each state to follow its individual laws with respect to the CHRI it generates. *See id.* Section 411.083 of the Government Code deems confidential CHRI that the Department of Public Safety ("DPS") maintains, except that DPS may disseminate this information as provided in chapter 411, subchapter F, or subchapter E-1 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 411.083(a). Sections 411.083(b)(1) and 411.089(a) authorize a criminal justice agency to obtain CHRI; however, a criminal justice agency may not release CHRI except to another criminal justice agency for a criminal justice purpose. *Id.* § 411.089(b)(1). Other entities specified in chapter 411 of the Government Code are entitled to obtain CHRI from DPS or another criminal justice agency; however, those entities may not release CHRI except as provided by chapter 411. *See generally id.* §§ 411.090-.127. Thus, any CHRI obtained from DPS or any other criminal justice agency must be withheld under section 552.101 in conjunction with chapter 411, subchapter F, of the Government Code. We note section 411.083 does not apply to active warrant information or other information relating to one's current involvement with the criminal justice system. *See id.* § 411.081(b) (police department allowed to disclose information pertaining to person's current involvement in the criminal justice system). Further, CHRI does not include driving record information. *See*

id. § 411.082(2)(B). Upon review, we find the information we marked consists of confidential CHRI the department must withhold under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code. However, we find you have failed to demonstrate any of the remaining information consists of confidential CHRI. Accordingly, the department may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 of the Government Code on this basis.

Section 552.101 also encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as section 560.003 of the Government Code, which provides that “[a] biometric identifier in the possession of a governmental body is exempt from disclosure under [the Act].” *Id.* § 560.003; *see id.* § 560.001(1) (“biometric identifier” means retina or iris scan, fingerprint, voiceprint, or record of hand or face geometry). There is no indication the requestor has a right of access to the submitted fingerprints under section 560.002. *See id.* § 560.002(1)(A) (governmental body may not sell, lease, or otherwise disclose individual’s biometric identifier to another person unless the individual consents to disclosure). Accordingly, the department must withhold the fingerprints you marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 560.003 of the Government Code.

As stated above, section 552.101 of the Government Code encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which is subject to the two part test discussed above. 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. *Indus. Found.*, 540 S.W.2d 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.⁴ *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. Additionally, this office has concluded some kinds of medical information are generally highly intimate or embarrassing. *See* Open Records Decision No. 455 (1987). Upon review, we find the information you marked, and the additional information we marked, satisfy the standard articulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation*. Accordingly, the department must withhold the information you marked, and the additional information we marked, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

⁴Section 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).

Section 552.130 of the Government Code provides information relating to a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit, a motor vehicle title or registration, or a personal identification document issued by an agency of Texas or another state or country is excepted from public release. Gov't Code § 552.130(a). Upon review, we find the department must withhold the motor vehicle record information you marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, with the exception of the specified incidents, to the extent the department maintains law enforcement records depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the department must withhold any such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The department must withhold the information we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with chapter 411 of the Government Code. The department must withhold the fingerprints you marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 560.003 of the Government Code. The department must withhold the information you marked, and the additional information we marked, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The department must also withhold the motor vehicle record information you marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.

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,



Ian Lancaster
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

IML/akg

Ref: ID# 611760

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)