



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 7, 2016

Mr. Jeffrey W. Giles
Assistant City Attorney
Legal Department
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2016-12942

Dear Mr. Giles:

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# 613551 (Houston GC No. 23221).

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to calls and complaints involving the requestor. You state you will release some information to the requestor. You claim a portion 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 public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses the informer's privilege, which has long been recognized by Texas courts. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969); *Hawthorne v. State*, 10 S.W.2d 724, 725 (Tex. Crim. App. 1928). 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).

The city states releasing the information it has marked would violate the informer’s privilege. However, the request reflects the requestor, who is the subject of the complaints, knows the identity of the complainant. Accordingly, we find the city failed to demonstrate the applicability of the common-law informer’s privilege to the information at issue. Accordingly, the city may not withhold the information it has marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer’s privilege. Therefore, as no other exceptions to disclosure are raised, the city must release the submitted 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,



Cristian Rosas-Grillet
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CRG/bw

Ref: ID# 613551

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)