



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 23, 2016

Ms. Leticia Brysch  
City Clerk  
City of Baytown  
P.O. Box 424  
Baytown, Texas 77522-0424

OR2016-14312

Dear Ms. Brysch:

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# 615880 (PIR # 6427).

The City of Baytown (the "city") received a request for a named city employee's appointment calendar and salary payments during a specified time. You state you released some information. You claim some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, and 552.117 of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts "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 is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person and (2) 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

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<sup>1</sup>Although you do not raise section 552.1175 of the Government Code in your brief, we understand you to raise this exception based on your markings. We note, however, although you claim section 552.1175 of the Government Code for a portion of the submitted information, section 552.117 is the proper exception to raise in this instance because the city holds the submitted information in an employment capacity.

satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. Types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court are delineated in *Industrial Foundation*. *Id.* at 683. We note the public generally has a legitimate interest in information that relates to public employment and public employees. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 542 (1990), 470 at 4 (1987) (public has legitimate interest in job qualifications and performance of public employees), 444 at 5-6 (1986) (public has legitimate interest in knowing reasons for dismissal, demotion, promotion, or resignation of public employees), 432 at 2 (1984) (scope of public employee privacy is narrow). This office has also found personal financial information not relating to the financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under common-law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 600 (1992) (public employee's withholding allowance certificate, designation of beneficiary of employee's retirement benefits, direct deposit authorization, and employee's decisions regarding voluntary benefits programs, among others, protected under common-law privacy), 545 (1990) (deferred compensation information, participation in voluntary investment program, election of optional insurance coverage, mortgage payments, assets, bills, and credit history). However, information concerning financial transactions between an employee and a public employer is generally of legitimate public interest. ORD 545. We note the payroll deductions for federal withholding tax are protected by common-law privacy and must be withheld under section 552.101, but the payroll deductions for social security, mandatory retirement, and Medicare are not protected by common-law privacy and may not be withheld under section 552.101. *See, e.g.*, ORDs 600 at 9-12 (participation in TexFlex), 545 at 3-5; *see also* Attorney General Opinion GA-0572 at 4 (2007) (public employee's net salary protected by common-law privacy, but gross salary is not).

Upon review, we find the information we marked satisfies the standard articulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation*. Accordingly, the city must generally withhold the marked information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, it is not clear whether some of the listed payroll deductions and benefits reflect mandatory participation by the employee or are the employee's voluntary financial decisions. Thus, to the extent this information reflects the employee's voluntary allocation of salary to optional investment, retirement, or other financial programs offered by the city, the city must withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, to the extent the information at issue reflects the employee's mandatory participation in the city's retirement program or benefits paid by the city, the deduction amounts are not confidential and may not be withheld on that basis. Further, we find the city has failed to demonstrate the remaining information you marked is highly intimate or embarrassing and of no legitimate public interest. Thus, the city may not withhold the remaining information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of constitutional privacy. Constitutional privacy 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. 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 (5th Cir. 1985)). After review of the remaining information at issue, we find you have failed to demonstrate any portion of the remaining information falls within the zones of privacy or implicates an individual's privacy interests for purposes of constitutional privacy. Therefore, the city may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue under section 552.101 on the basis of constitutional privacy.

Section 552.102(a) of the Government Code 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). The Texas Supreme Court held section 552.102(a) excepts from disclosure the dates of birth of state employees in the payroll database of the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts. *Tex. Comptroller of Pub. Accounts v. Attorney Gen. of Tex.*, 354 S.W.3d 336 (Tex. 2010). Accordingly, the city must withhold the information you marked under section 552.102(a) of the Government Code.

Section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure the home address and telephone number, emergency contact information, social security number, and family member information of a current or former employee or official of a governmental body who requests this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(1). Whether a particular item of information is protected by section 552.117(a)(1) must be determined at the time of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). Thus, information may be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) only on behalf of a current or former employee or official who made a request for confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. Information may not be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) on behalf of a current or former employee or official who did not timely request under section 552.024 the information be kept confidential. Therefore, to the extent the individual whose information is at issue timely requested confidentiality under section 552.024 of the Government Code, the city must withhold the information we marked under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code. Conversely, to the extent the individual at issue did not timely request confidentiality under section 552.024, the city may not withhold the marked information under section 552.117(a)(1).

In summary, the city must withhold the information we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy; however, the marked payroll

information may only be withheld if it reflects the employee's voluntary allocation of salary to optional investment, retirement, or other financial programs offered by the city. The city must withhold the information you marked under section 552.102(a) of the Government Code. To the extent the individual whose information is at issue timely requested confidentiality under section 552.024 of the Government Code, the city must withhold the information we marked under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code. 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](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,



Meagan J. Conway  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MJC/akg

Ref: ID# 615880

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)