



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 12, 2016

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

OR2016-20467

Dear Mr. Hinds:

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# 626274.

The Ellis County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information relating to a specified case. The sheriff's office claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception the sheriff's office claims 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. Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides, in relevant part:

(a) [T]he following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under [the Act], and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

- (1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under [chapter 261 of the Family Code] and the identity of the person making the report; and
- (2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers

used or developed in an investigation under [chapter 261 of the Family Code] or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). The sheriff's office contends the submitted information is confidential under section 261.201. However, we find the sheriff's office has failed to demonstrate the submitted information involves a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect of a child made under chapter 261 or the information was used or developed in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect. *See id.* §§ 101.003(a) (defining "child" for purposes of section 261.201 as person under 18 years of age who is not and has not been married or who has not had the disabilities of minority removed for general purposes); 261.001(1), (4) (defining "abuse" and "neglect" for purposes of chapter 261 of the Family Code). Therefore, the sheriff's office may not withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 58.007 of the Family Code. Section 58.007 provides, in relevant part:

(c) Except as provided by Subsection (d), law enforcement records and files concerning a child and information stored, by electronic means or otherwise, concerning the child from which a record or file could be generated may not be disclosed to the public and shall be:

(1) if maintained on paper or microfilm, kept separate from adult files and records;

(2) if maintained electronically in the same computer system as records or files relating to adults, be accessible under controls that are separate and distinct from controls to access electronic data concerning adults; and

(3) maintained on a local basis only and not sent to a central state or federal depository, except as provided by Subchapters B, D, and E.

...

(e) Law enforcement records and files concerning a child may be inspected or copied by a juvenile justice agency as that term is defined by Section 58.101, a criminal justice agency as that term is defined by Section 411.082, Government Code, the child, and the child's parent or guardian.

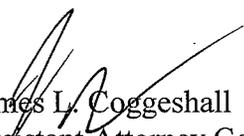
Id. § 58.007(c), (e). Juvenile law enforcement records relating to delinquent conduct or conduct indicating a need for supervision that occurred on or after September 1, 1997, are confidential under section 58.007(c). *See id.* § 51.03(a)-(b) (defining "delinquent conduct"

and “conduct indicating a need for supervision” for purposes of section 58.007). For purposes of section 58.007(c), “child” means a person who is ten years of age or older and under seventeen years of age at the time of the conduct at issue. *See id.* § 51.02(2). Upon review, we agree the submitted information involves a juvenile engaged in delinquent conduct or conduct indicating a need for supervision that occurred after September 1, 1997. As such, this information constitutes a juvenile law enforcement record that is confidential pursuant to section 58.007(c). In this instance, the requestor may be a parent or guardian of the juvenile offender and, therefore, may have a right of access to the submitted information pursuant to section 58.007(e). *See id.* § 58.007(e). Thus, we must rule conditionally. If the requestor is not a parent or guardian of the juvenile offender, then the sheriff’s office must withhold the submitted information in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 58.007(c) of the Family Code. If, however, the requestor is the parent or guardian of the juvenile offender, then the sheriff’s office may not use section 58.007(c) to withhold this information from this requestor. *See id.* § 58.007(e). In that instance, the sheriff’s office 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,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/bw

Ref: ID# 626274

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)