



April 4, 2001

Mr. Lance Vanzant
Hayes, Coffey & Berry, P.C.
P.O. Box 50149
Denton, Texas 76206

OR2001-1353

Dear Mr. Vanzant:

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# 145612.

The City of Oak Point (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for complaints pertaining to a specified construction site. You indicate the city has released the responsive information, except for the specific information you have marked in the submitted documents. You claim that this information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the informer's privilege. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

The informer's privilege, incorporated into the Act by section 552.101, 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). It protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority, provided that the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1988), 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 2 (1981) (citing Wigmore, Evidence, § 2374, at 767

(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 4-5 (1988).

Here, you represent that the submitted documents are reports of violations of city ordinance number 00-21, a class C misdemeanor. Accordingly, we agree that the information you have marked in the documents dated September 5, 2000 and January 4, 2001 may be withheld under section 552.101 in conjunction with the informer's privilege. As to the document dated January 8, 2001, we do not agree that all of the information you have marked, if released, reveals the identity of an informer. We have therefore marked the information contained in this document that the city may withhold under section 552.101 in conjunction with the informer's privilege. The remaining information in the document dated January 8, 2001 is not excepted from disclosure and is subject to release to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

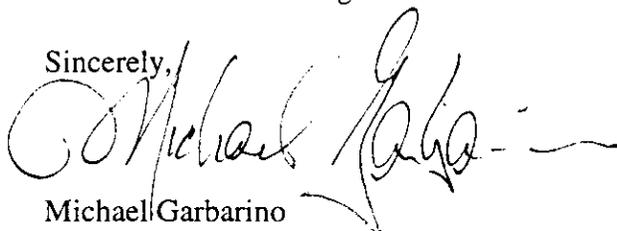
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental

body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Garbarino", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Michael Garbarino
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MG/seg

Ref: ID# 145612

Encl. Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Nick Farhood
1219 Cedar Pine Lane
Oak Point, Texas 75068
(w/o enclosures)