ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 22, 2003

Ms. Elizabeth Lutton
Senior Attorney
City of Arlington
P. O. Box 90231
Arlington, Texas 76004-3231

OR2003-6627

Dear Ms. Lutton:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 188112.

The City of Arlington (the "city") received a request for complaints made about a specified address. You state that the city has released some responsive information to the requestor. You claim, however, that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and have reviewed the submitted information.

You claim that the red-bracketed information in the submitted document is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege.[1] The common-law informer's privilege has long been recognized by Texas courts and is incorporated into the Public Information Act (the "Act") by section 552.101. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969); *see also 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 that the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1988), 208 at 1-2 (1978). The informer's privilege also 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

[1] Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.

enforcement within their particular spheres." *See* 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 carrying a civil or criminal penalty. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4-5 (1988). You inform us that the submitted information reveals the identity of an individual who reported an alleged violation of a city ordinance. You state, and have submitted documentation indicating, that a violation of the ordinance in question can result in the imposition of a criminal penalty. Based on your representations and our review of the red-bracketed information, we conclude that the city may withhold this information pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege.

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).

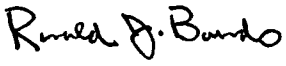
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following 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 Dep't of Pub. 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 Texas Building and Procurement 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. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. 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,



Ronald J. Bounds
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RJB/lmt

Ref: ID# 188112

Enc. Submitted document

c: Mr. Roland Bergstrom
2001 Westview Terrace
Arlington, Texas 76013
(w/o enclosure)