



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 23, 2005

Ms. YuShan Chang
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 1562
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

OR2005-04442

Dear Ms. Chang:

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# 224521.

The Houston Police Department (the "department") received a request for a specified incident report. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Section 552.101 encompasses the doctrine of common law privacy, which protects information if (1) the information contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) the information is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976), *cert. denied*, 430 U.S. 931 (1977). The type of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* included information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. 540 S.W.2d at 683.

The records at issue contain information that is considered highly intimate or embarrassing and is not of legitimate concern to the public. In most cases, only this information would be excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

In this instance, however, the requestor knows the nature of the incident in question as well as the identity of the individual involved. Therefore, withholding only the nature of the incident would not preserve the individual's common-law right of privacy. Accordingly, to protect the privacy of the individual to whom the information relates, we find that the department must generally withhold the submitted records in their entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

We note, however, that the requestor identifies himself, and the submitted information reflects, that he is the spouse of the individual to whom the submitted information pertains. As such, the requestor may have a special right of access to the submitted information as the authorized representative of the individual to whom it pertains. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023; Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individual requests information concerning himself). If the requestor has a right of access to the submitted information under section 552.023, then the department may not withhold any of this information from the requestor on privacy grounds under section 552.101.

However, if the requestor does have a right of access to the submitted information that would otherwise be excepted based on his spouse's common law right to privacy, the information may nonetheless be excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Section 552.108(a)(2) excepts from disclosure information concerning an investigation that concluded in a result other than conviction or deferred adjudication. A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(2) must demonstrate that the requested information relates to a criminal investigation that has concluded in a final result other than a conviction or deferred adjudication. You explain that the submitted information relates to an investigation that concluded without criminal charges being filed. We thus understand you to assert that the requested information pertains to a case that concluded in a result other than conviction or deferred adjudication. Therefore, we agree that section 552.108(a)(2) is applicable.

However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle Publishing Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, you may withhold the requested information from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(2). We note that you have the discretion to release all or part of the remaining information that is not otherwise confidential by law. Gov't Code § 552.007.¹

¹ We note that the basic information being released contains information that would be excepted from disclosure to the general public under laws and exceptions designed to protect privacy. If the department receives another request for this information from a person who would not have a special right of access, the department should resubmit this same information and request another decision. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302; Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001).

In summary, the department must withhold the submitted records in their entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, if the department determines that the requestor has a right of access to the submitted information under section 552.023, then the department may not withhold any of this information from the requestor on privacy grounds under section 552.101. Further, if the requestor does have a right of access, with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, which must be released, the department may withhold the submitted information from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(2).

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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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); *Tex. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cary Grace", written in a cursive style.

Cary Grace
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ECG/jev

Ref: ID# 224521

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Patrick Craig
21718 Hollyleaf Court
Porter, Texas 77365
(w/o enclosures)