



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 22, 2007

Mr. David K. Walker
County Attorney
Montgomery County
207 West Phillips, 1st Floor
Conroe, Texas 77301

OR2007-03153

Dear Mr. Walker:

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# 277643.

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for a specified offense report and all reports regarding a specified address over the preceding twelve years. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that you have only submitted the specified offense report for our review. Therefore, to the extent that any other responsive documents existed when the sheriff received the request, we presume that you have released such information to the requestor. If you have not released any such information, you must do so at this time. *See id.* §§ 552.301(a), .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply, then it must release information as soon as possible).

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 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). 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. *Id.* at 683. Generally, only highly intimate information that implicates the privacy right of an individual is withheld. However, in instances of sexual assault or attempted suicide, where it is demonstrated that the requestor knows the identity of the victim, as well as the nature of the incident, the entire report must be withheld to protect the victim's privacy. In this instance, the submitted information reflects that the requestor knows the identity of the individual and that the named individual attempted to commit suicide. Therefore, withholding only the victim's identity or certain details of the incident from the requestor would not preserve the subject individual's common-law right of privacy. Accordingly, we agree that to protect the privacy of the individual to whom the information relates, the sheriff must withhold the submitted information in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

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); *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 Office of the Attorney General 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 cursive script that reads "L. Joseph James".

L. Joseph James
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LJJ/eb

Ref: ID# 277643

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Deborah Shaw
15658 Creighton Road
Conroe, Texas 77302
(w/o enclosures)