



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 13, 2007

Captain Byron McMillen
Panola County Sheriff's Department
314 West Wellington
Carthage, Texas 75633

OR2007-16449

Dear Capt. McMillen:

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# 297298.

The Panola County Sheriff's Department (the "department") received a request for telephone records, tracking information, and recordings of telephone conversations between named individuals from September 22, 2007 at 5:00 p.m. to September 23, 2007 at 11:00 a.m.; video tapes of the jail lobby and booking rooms for the same time; and all documents pertaining to a named individual. You state that the department does not have some of the requested information.¹ You also state that some of the requested information has been or will be released with certain information redacted, but claim that the submitted 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.

We first note that a social security number and driver's license and motor vehicle information have been redacted from the submitted documents. Section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act. The department is not authorized, however, to redact driver's license and

¹We note the Act does not require a governmental body to disclose information that did not exist when the request for information was received. *Econ. Opportunities Dev. Corp. v. Bustamante*, 562 S.W.2d 266 (Tex. App. — San Antonio 1978, writ dismissed); Open Records Decision No. 452 at 3 (1986).

motor vehicle information without requesting a decision. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(a). As we are able in this instance to discern the nature of the redacted information, we will determine whether it is excepted from public disclosure. In the future, however, the department should refrain from redacting any information that it submits to this office in seeking an open records ruling. *See id.* §§ 552.301(e)(1)(D), .302.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Section 552.101 of the Government Code encompasses the doctrines of common-law and constitutional privacy.² Common law privacy 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 types 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. In addition, this office has found that the following types of information are excepted from required public disclosure under common law privacy: some kinds of medical information or information indicating disabilities or specific illnesses, *see* Open Records Decision Nos. 470 (1987) (illness from severe emotional and job-related stress), 455 (1987) (prescription drugs, illnesses, operations, and physical handicaps); personal financial information not relating to the financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body, *see* Open Records Decision Nos. 600 (1992), 545 (1990); and identities of victims of sexual abuse, *see* Open Records Decision Nos. 440 (1986), 393 (1983), 339 (1982). However, this office has found that the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of members of the public are not excepted from required public disclosure under common law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision No. 455 (1987) (absent special circumstances, the home addresses and telephone numbers of private citizens are generally not protected under the Act's privacy exceptions).

The constitutional right to privacy protects two types of interests. *See* Open Records Decision No. 600 at 4 (1992) (citing *Ramie v. City of Hedwig Village*, 765 F.2d 490 (5th Cir. 1985)). The first is the interest in independence in making certain important decisions related to the “zones of privacy” recognized by the United States Supreme Court. *Id.* The zones of privacy recognized by the United States Supreme Court are matters pertaining to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relationships, and child rearing and education. *See id.*

²The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

The second interest is the interest in avoiding disclosure of personal matters. The test for whether information may be publicly disclosed without violating constitutional privacy rights involves a balancing of the individual's privacy interests against the public's need to know information of public concern. *See* Open Records Decision No. 455 at 5-7 (1987) (citing *Fadjo v. Coon*, 633 F.2d 1172, 1176 (5th Cir. 1981)). The scope of information considered private under the constitutional doctrine is far narrower than that under the common-law right to privacy; the material must concern the "most intimate aspects of human affairs." *See id.* at 5 (citing *Ramie v. City of Hedwig Village*, 765 F.2d at 492).

In Open Records Decision No. 430 (1985), our office determined that a list of inmate visitors is protected by constitutional privacy because people have a First Amendment right to correspond with inmates, and that right would be threatened if their names were released. *See also* Open Records Decision Nos. 428 (1985), 185 (1978) (public's right to obtain an inmate's correspondence list is not sufficient to overcome the First Amendment right of the inmate's correspondents to maintain communication with inmate free of the threat of public exposure). We have determined that the same principles apply to telephone numbers called by inmates during booking as well as recorded conversations from a telephone at the jail. Upon review, we agree that telephone numbers you have highlighted and the submitted recordings that pertain to inmates' correspondents and visitors are protected by constitutional privacy and must be withheld. However, any of the recordings that pertain to other matters involving the department are not protected by common-law or constitutional privacy.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code exempts from disclosure information that "relates to . . . a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state [or] a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state." Gov't Code § 552.130. In accordance with section 552.130, the department must withhold the marked Texas motor vehicle record information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.130.

In summary, the department must withhold the telephone numbers you have highlighted and the submitted recordings pertaining to inmate correspondents and visitors under section 552.101. The department must also withhold the Texas motor vehicle record information that you have marked, in addition to the information we have marked, under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The remaining submitted information must be released.

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); *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,



Jessica J. Maloney
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JJM/jh

Ref: ID# 297298

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Lester Bellows
318 West Wellington
Carthage, Texas 75633
(w/o enclosures)