



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

February 27, 2008

Ms. Candice M. De La Garza  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Houston  
P.O. Box 1562  
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

OR2008-02664

Dear Ms. De La Garza:

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# 303305.

The Houston Police Department (the "department") received a request for information regarding a named individual. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.130, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception 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. *See Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both elements of this test must be established. *See id.* at 681-82. A compilation of an individual's criminal history is highly embarrassing information, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person. *Cf. U.S. Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (when considering prong regarding individual's privacy interest, court recognized distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of information and noted that individual has significant privacy interest in

compilation of one's criminal history). Furthermore, we find that a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public. The present request requires the department to compile unspecified law enforcement records concerning the named individual. Therefore, to the extent the department maintains law enforcement records depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, any such information is protected by common-law privacy under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

We note, however, that the requestor submitted a release form that appears to be signed by the named individual allowing the release of this type of information to the requestor. If so, the requestor may have a special right of access to a compilation of the named individual's criminal history, to the extent that it exists.<sup>1</sup> *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(b) (governmental body may not deny access to person to whom information relates or person's agent on grounds that information is considered confidential by privacy principles). You inform us that the department asked that the requestor submit proof of the identity of the individual at issue in order to verify that this individual signed the release. We note that section 552.222(a) of the Government Code provides that a governmental body may make an inquiry to the requestor to establish proper identification. *See id.* § 552.222(a). You state that the department has not received a response from the requestor, and therefore, has not been able to properly establish identification for the individual whose records are at issue. Therefore, if the department receives proper identification for the individual at issue, the department may not withhold any of the requested information from the requestor under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy. *See id.* § 552.023. If the department does not receive proper identification for the individual at issue, then to the extent the department maintains law enforcement records depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the department must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

In the event that the department does receive proof of identification for the individual at issue in the request, we will address your remaining arguments against disclosure. Section 552.130 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information relating to a Texas motor vehicle driver's license and information relating to a Texas motor vehicle title or registration. *Id.* § 552.130. In accordance with section 552.130, the department must withhold the Texas motor vehicle record information you have marked in the submitted information.

Section 552.147 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

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<sup>1</sup>If the requestor is the authorized representative of the individual at issue, then she would also have a right of access to the named individual's driver's license and social security number. *See* Gov't Code 552.023(b); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individual or authorized representative asks governmental body to provide information concerning that individual).

under the Act. *Id.* § 552.147. Accordingly, the department may withhold the social security numbers you have marked under section 552.147 of the Government Code.

In summary, to the extent the department maintains records depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, to which the requestor does not have a special right of access, the department must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. If the submitted release form was signed by the named individual, then the department must withhold the information you have marked pursuant to section 552.130 of the Government Code. The department may withhold the social security numbers you have marked under section 552.147 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released 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 file suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, 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 challenge 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,



Amy L.S. Shipp  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

ALS/mcf

Ref: ID# 303305

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Pat Allen  
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(w/o enclosures)