



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 19, 2008

Mr. Scott A. Durfee
General Counsel
Office of the District Attorney
1201 Franklin Street, Suite 600
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2008-06773

Dear Mr. Durfee:

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# 310581.

The Harris County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney") received a request for a named employee's personnel file. You claim that portions of the requested information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.117, and 552.130 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't

¹Although you raise section 552.024 of the Government Code, we note that this section is not an exception to public disclosure under the Act. Rather, this section permits a current or former official or employee of a governmental body to choose whether to allow public access to certain information relating to the current or former official or employee that is held by the employing governmental body. See Gov't Code § 552.024. Section 552.117 of the Government Code is instead the proper exception to assert. Although you raise section 552.002 of the Government Code, we note that this section is not an exception to public disclosure under the Act. Rather, section 552.002 is a provision of the Act that defines "public information" for purposes of the Act. We also note that while you raise sections 552.102, 552.103, 552.107, 552.108, 552.109, 552.111, 552.1175, and 552.147 of the Government Code, you make no arguments to support these exceptions. Therefore, we assume you have withdrawn your claim that these sections apply to the submitted information.

Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. Section 6103(a) of title 26 of the United States Code provides that tax return information is confidential. *See* 26 U.S.C. § 6103(a)(2), (b)(2)(A), (p)(8); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 600 (1992); Attorney General Op. MW-372 (1981). Exhibit B-1 consists of W-4 tax forms. Accordingly, the district attorney must withhold this information under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 6103(a).

Section 552.101 also encompasses Chapter 560 of the Government Code, which provides that a governmental body may not release fingerprint information except in certain limited circumstances. *See* Gov't Code §§ 560.001 (defining "biometric identifier" to include fingerprints), 560.002 (prescribing manner in which biometric identifiers must be maintained and circumstances in which they can be released), 560.003 (biometric identifiers in possession of governmental body exempt from disclosure under the Act). You do not inform us, and the submitted information does not indicate, that section 560.002 permits the disclosure of the submitted fingerprint information. Therefore, the district attorney must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 560.003 of the Government Code.

Criminal history record information ("CHRI") generated by the National Crime Information Center or by the Texas Crime Information Center is confidential. Title 28, part 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations governs the release of CHRI that states obtain from the federal government or other states. Open Records Decision No. 565 (1990). The federal regulations allow each state to follow its individual law with respect to CHRI it generates. *Id.* Section 411.083 of the Government Code deems confidential CHRI that the Department of Public Safety ("DPS") maintains, except that the DPS may disseminate this information as provided in subchapter F of chapter 411 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 411.083.

Sections 411.083(b)(1) and 411.089(a) authorize a criminal justice agency to obtain CHRI, but a criminal justice agency may not release CHRI except to another criminal justice agency for a criminal justice purpose. *Id.* § 411.089(b)(1). Other entities specified in chapter 411 of the Government Code are entitled to obtain CHRI from DPS or another criminal justice agency; however, those entities may not release CHRI except as provided by chapter 411. *See generally id.* §§ 411.090-411.127. Thus, any CHRI generated by the federal government or another state may not be made available to the requestor except in accordance with federal regulations. *See* ORD 565 (1990). The district attorney must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with federal law and chapter 411 of the Government Code.

Section 552.101 also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information that (1) contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person and (2) is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976).

Prior decisions of this office have found that financial information relating only to an individual ordinarily satisfies the first requirement of the test for common-law privacy, but that there is a legitimate public interest in the essential facts about a financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 600 (1992), 545 (1990), 373 (1983). For example, a public employee's allocation of his salary to a voluntary investment program or to optional insurance coverage which is offered by his employer is a personal investment decision and information about it is excepted from disclosure under the common-law right of privacy. *See* ORD 545. Likewise, an employee's designation of a retirement beneficiary is excepted from disclosure under the common-law right to privacy. *See* ORD 600. However, information revealing that an employee participates in a group insurance plan funded partly or wholly by the governmental body is not excepted from disclosure. *See id.* at 10. This office also has found that the public has a legitimate interest in information relating to employees of governmental bodies and their employment qualifications and job performance. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 562 at 10 (1990), 542 at 5 (1990); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 423 at 2 (1984) (scope of public employee privacy is narrow). This office has also found that some kinds of medical information or information indicating disabilities or specific illnesses are excepted from required public disclosure under common-law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 470 (1987) (illness from severe emotional and job-related stress), 455 (1987) (prescription drugs, illnesses, operations, and physical handicaps). We have marked the information that is confidential under common-law privacy and that the district attorney must withhold under section 552.101. However, the remaining information is not highly intimate or embarrassing; therefore, the remaining information is not confidential under common-law privacy, and the district attorney may not withhold it on that ground.

Section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure the current and former home addresses and telephone numbers, social security number, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body who request that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. Whether a particular piece of information is protected by section 552.117(a)(1) must be determined at the time the request for it is made. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). You state, and provide documentation showing, that the employee at issue timely elected to keep these types of information confidential. Therefore, the district attorney must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.117.

Next, section 552.130 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information that "relates to . . . a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state." Gov't Code § 552.130(a)(1). Therefore, the district attorney must withhold the Texas driver's license information we have marked under section 552.130.

In summary, in conjunction with section 552.101 of the Government Code, the district attorney must withhold: (1) Exhibit B-1 under section 6103(a) of title 26 of the United States Code; (2) the information we have marked under section 560.003 of the Government Code;

(3) the CHRI we have marked under federal law and chapter 411 of the Government Code; and (4) the information we have marked under common-law privacy. The district attorney must also withhold the information we have marked under sections 552.117 and 552.130 of the Government Code. The district attorney must release the remaining information.

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,



Bill Dobie
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

WJD/eeg

Ref: ID# 310581

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Paige Hewitt
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Houston, Texas 77005
(w/o enclosures)