



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

GREG ABBOTT

March 19, 2009

Ms. Cheryl K. Byles
Assistant City Attorney
City of Fort Worth
1000 Throckmorton Street 3rd Floor
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2009-03597

Dear Ms. Byles:

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# 337512 (PIR No. 1279-09).

The City of Fort Worth (the "city") received a request for information relating to inspections, violations, and mandatory upgrades involving a specified address. You state that most of the requested information is being released. You claim that some of the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code and privileged under Texas Rule of Evidence 508. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the information you submitted.

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 Code § 552.101. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege, which Texas courts have long recognized. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969). The informer's privilege protects the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority, provided that the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1998), 208 at 1-2 (1978)*. The informer's privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar law-enforcement agencies, as well as those who report violations of statutes with civil or criminal penalties to "administrative officials having

a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres.” See Open Records Decision No. 279 at 2 (1981) (citing Wigmore, Evidence, § 2374, at 767 (McNaughton rev. ed. 1961)). The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. See Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4-5 (1988). The privilege excepts the informer’s statement only to the extent necessary to protect the informer’s identity. See Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990).

You state that the submitted information identifies citizens who reported violations of the city code to city staff members charged with enforcement of the code. You also inform us that violations of the code are punishable by civil and criminal penalties. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted information, we have marked the information that identifies informants. We conclude that the city may withhold that information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer’s privilege.¹

You also raise section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy, which protects information that is highly intimate or embarrassing, such that its release would be highly objectionable to a person of ordinary sensibilities, and of no legitimate public interest. See *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). Common-law privacy encompasses the types of information that are held to be intimate or embarrassing in *Industrial Foundation*. See *id.* at 683 (information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs). This office has concluded that other types of information also are private under section 552.101. See generally Open Records Decision No. 659 at 4-5 (1999) (summarizing information attorney general has held to be private). Additionally, we have concluded that a compilation of a private individual’s criminal history is highly embarrassing information, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and is generally not of legitimate concern to the public. Cf. *United States 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). We also have determined that financial information that relates only to an individual ordinarily satisfies the first element of the common-law privacy test, but the public has a legitimate interest in the essential facts about a financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body. See Open Records Decision Nos. 600 at 9-12 (1992), 545 at 4 (1990), 523 at 4 (1989), 373 at 4 (1983). We find that none of the remaining information at issue is intimate or embarrassing and not a matter of legitimate public interest. We therefore conclude that the city may not withhold

¹As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your claim under Texas Rule of Evidence 508.

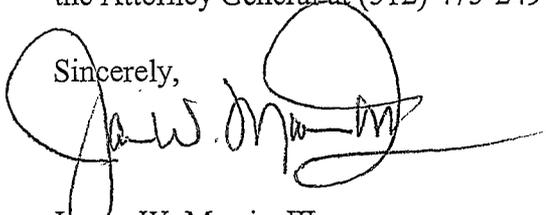
any of the remaining information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

In summary, the city may withhold the information that we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. The rest of the submitted information must be released.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General at (512) 475-2497.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James W. Morris, III", written over a circular stamp or mark.

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/cc

Ref: ID# 337512

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)