



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

GREG ABBOTT

June 30, 2009

Ms. Martha T. Williams
Olson & Olson, L.L.P.
Wortham Tower, Suite 600
2727 Allen Parkway
Houston, Texas 77019

OR2009-09028

Dear Ms. Williams:

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# 347985.

The Humble Police Department (the "department"), which you represent, received a request for records pertaining to two named individuals over a specified period of time. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, and 552.108 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 disclosure "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 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). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both prongs of this test must be demonstrated. *Id.* at 681-82. A compilation of an individual's criminal history record information 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) (finding significant privacy interest in compilation of individual's criminal history by recognizing distinction between public

records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of criminal history information). Furthermore, we find that a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public.

In this instance, the requestor asks for unspecified records pertaining to two named individuals. This request implicates such individuals' right to privacy. However, we note the requestor has submitted a signed release form from one of the named individuals. Thus, the requestor is the authorized representative of this individual, and, as such, has a special right of access to this individual's private information. *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). Therefore, to the extent the department maintains law enforcement records depicting this named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the information is not private in this instance, and the department may not withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code. Furthermore, the information you have submitted does not list the other named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, and is therefore not part of a compilation of that individual's criminal history. Thus, the submitted information is not private in this instance, and the department may not withhold it under section 552.101 on this basis. Therefore, we will address your remaining arguments against disclosure of the submitted information.

Section 552.101 also encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as section 58.007 of the Family Code. Juvenile law enforcement records relating to delinquent conduct or conduct indicating a need for supervision that occurred on or after September 1, 1997 are confidential under section 58.007. Section 58.007(c) reads as follows:

Except as provided by Subsection (d), law enforcement records and files concerning a child and information stored, by electronic means or otherwise, concerning the child from which a record or file could be generated may not be disclosed to the public and shall be:

- (1) if maintained on paper or microfilm, kept separate from adult files and records;
- (2) if maintained electronically in the same computer system as records or files relating to adults, be accessible under controls that are separate and distinct from controls to access electronic data concerning adults; and
- (3) maintained on a local basis only and not sent to a central state or federal depository, except as provided by Subchapter B.

Fam. Code § 58.007(c). For purposes of section 58.007, "child" means a person who is ten years of age or older and under seventeen years of age. *See id.* § 51.02(2). We note, however, that section 58.007(c) is not applicable to information that relates to a juvenile as a complainant, victim, witness, or other involved party; it is only applicable to juveniles listed as suspects, offenders, or defendants. *See id.* § 58.007(c). The submitted reports do not contain juveniles listed as suspects, offenders, or defendants. Therefore, section 58.007(c) of the Family Code does not apply to the submitted information. Accordingly, the department may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 58.007(c) of the Family Code.

Section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if . . . release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). Generally, a governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(1) must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You inform us the submitted information relates to criminal convictions that are currently on appeal and, therefore, the information is related to a pending prosecution. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude the release of the submitted information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e.*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976) (per curiam) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases). Thus section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable.

However, we note, and you acknowledge, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-87; Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Thus, with the exception of basic information, which you state will be released, the department may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.¹

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.

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure, except to note that basic information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle* is generally not excepted from public disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. Open Records Decision No. 597 (1991).

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,



Matt Entsminger
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MRE/dls

Ref: ID# 347985

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)