



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 13, 2010

Mr. J. David Dodd, III
Nichols, Jackson, Dillard, Hagar & Smith L.L.P.
Attorney for City of Allen
1800 Lincoln Plaza
500 North Akard
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2010-00641

Dear Mr. Dodd:

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# 367348 (ID Number 40249).

The City of Allen (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You claim the requested 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 section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides in part:

(a) [T]he following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under [the Act] and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

(1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and

(2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

...

(k) Notwithstanding Subsection (a), an investigating agency, other than the [Texas Department of Family and Protective Services] or the Texas Youth Commission, on request, shall provide to the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of a child who is the subject of reported abuse or neglect, or to the child if the child is at least 18 years of age, information concerning the reported abuse or neglect that would otherwise be confidential under this section. The investigating agency shall withhold information under this subsection if the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of the child requesting the information is alleged to have committed the abuse or neglect.

(l) Before a child or a parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of a child may inspect or copy a record or file concerning the child under Subsection (k), the custodian of the record or file must redact:

(1) any personally identifiable information about a victim or witness under 18 years of age unless that victim or witness is:

(A) the child who is the subject of the report;
or

(B) another child of the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative requesting the information;

(2) any information that is excepted from required disclosure under [the Act], or other law; and

(3) the identity of the person who made the report.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a), (k), (l). You state the submitted report was used or developed in an investigation under chapter 261 of the Family Code. *See id.* § 261.001 (defining “abuse” and “neglect” for purposes of Fam. Code ch. 261). You also state that this matter was referred to Child Protective Services Division (“CPS”) of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude that the submitted report is within the scope of section 261.201 of the Family Code. Accordingly, the submitted report is generally confidential under section 261.201 of the Family Code.

We note, however, that the requestor may be the parent of the child victims listed in the report. Further, this individual is not alleged to have committed the suspected abuse or neglect. As it is not clear whether the requestor is a parent of the child victims for purposes of section 261.201(k), we must rule conditionally. If the requestor is not the parent of the child victims listed in the report, the submitted information must be withheld in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.

If the requestor is the parent of the child victims, the city may not use section 261.201(a) to withhold the information at issue from him. *Id.* § 261.201(k). However, we note section 261.201(l)(2) states any information that is excepted from required disclosure under the Act or other law may still be withheld from disclosure. *Id.* § 261.201(l)(2). You assert that the submitted information is excepted from public disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Thus, to the extent the requestor is the parent of the child victims in the report, we will consider your remaining argument against disclosure of the submitted information.

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). A governmental body claiming section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A); *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that the submitted information relates to a pending criminal investigation and prosecution. Based on this representation, we conclude that the release of this 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. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref’d n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases).

We note, however, that 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* Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). Therefore, with the exception of basic information, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.¹

¹As our ruling for this information is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure, except to note that basic information may generally not be withheld from public disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. Open Records Decision No. 597 (1991).

In summary, if the requestor is not the parent of the child victims listed in the report, the submitted information must be withheld in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code. If the requestor is the parent of the child victims listed in the report, with the exception of basic information, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

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, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Adam Leiber
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ACL/rl

Ref: ID# 367058

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)