



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 19, 2010

Ms. Cary Grace
Assistant City Attorney
City of Austin
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767-8828

OR2010-03918

Dear Ms. Grace:

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# 378261.

The City of Austin (the "city") received a request for information relating to complaints regarding signs in a specified neighborhood. You claim that some of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim 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 claim 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*

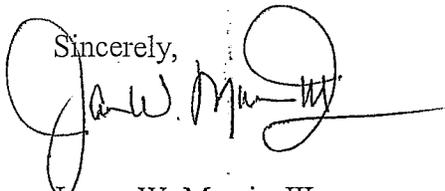
(McNaughton rev. ed. 1961)). The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4-5 (1988). The privilege excepts the informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect the informer's identity. *See* Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990).

You have marked the information the city seeks to withhold on the basis of the informer's privilege. You explain that the marked information identifies a complainant who reported an alleged violation of section 25-10-103 of the city code. You state that the alleged violation was reported to the city's code compliance department, which is authorized to enforce section 25-10-103. You also state that a violation of that section is punishable by a fine. Based on your representations, we conclude that the city may withhold the marked information 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, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James W. Morris, III". The signature is stylized with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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

JWM/cc

Ref: ID# 378261

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)