



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

April 23, 2010

Mr. David K. Walker
County Attorney
Montgomery County
Open Records Division
207 West Phillips, 1st Floor
Conroe, Texas 77301

OR2010-05812

Dear Mr. Walker:

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# 378017 (ORR# 2010-0715).

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for information related to case number 09A000562. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception 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. Common-law privacy 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). The types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* included information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. *Id.* at 683. Generally, only highly intimate information that implicates the privacy of an individual is withheld. However, in certain instances, where it is demonstrated the requestor knows the identity of the individual involved as well as the nature of certain incidents, the entire report must be withheld to protect the individual's privacy. In this instance, you state, and the documents reflect, the requestor knows both the identity of the individual involved and the nature of the information in the submitted documents. Therefore, withholding only the individual's identity or certain details of the incident from the requestor would not preserve the subject individual's common-law right to privacy. Accordingly, to protect the privacy of the individual to whom the information relates, the

sheriff must generally withhold the submitted information in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

We note the requestor is the spouse of the individual whose private information is at issue. Thus, the requestor may be this individual's authorized representative. If the requestor is acting as her spouse's authorized representative, then she has a special right of access to information that would ordinarily be withheld to protect privacy interests. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(a) (person or person's authorized representative has special right of access, beyond right of general public, to information held by governmental body that relates to person and is protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect person's privacy interests). Thus, if the requestor is acting as her spouse's authorized representative, then the sheriff may not withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy, and it must be released in its entirety.¹ *See* Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individual requests information concerning himself). If the requestor is not acting as her spouse's authorized representative, then the sheriff must withhold the submitted information in its entirety under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/jb

¹We note, however, the information being released in this instance includes information that may be confidential with respect to the general public. Therefore, if the sheriff receives another request for this information from an individual other than this requestor, the sheriff must again seek a ruling from this office.

Ref: ID# 378017

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)