



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 2, 2010

Ms. Judith Sachitano Rawls
Assistant City Attorney
City of Beaumont
P.O. Box 3827
Beaumont, Texas 77704-3827

OR2010-09797

Dear Ms. Rawls:

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# 390486 (Beaumont ORR 05-54).

The City of Beaumont (the "city") received a request for a specified animal control complaint. You claim that 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.

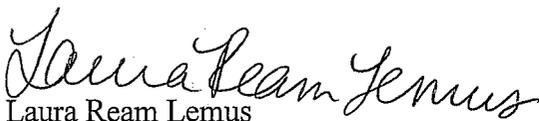
Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege, which Texas courts have long recognized. *See 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 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*. 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 reveals the identity of an individual who reported a possible violation of state law and municipal ordinance to the city. You explain the city has the authority to enforce the violation at issue. You state that such violations are subject to criminal penalties. Based upon your representations and our review, we conclude that the city may withhold the identifying information of the complainant, which we have marked, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. However, the remaining information does not identify the informer and may not be withheld on that basis.¹ As no further exceptions are raised, the remaining information must be released to the requestor.

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,


Laura Ream Lemus
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LRL/jb

Ref: ID# 390486

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against the disclosure of the marked information.