



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

August 25, 2010

Mr. Dan Meador  
Assistant General Counsel  
Texas Department of State Health Services  
P. O. Box 149347  
Austin, Texas 78714-9347

OR2010-12960

Dear Mr. Meador:

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#392413 (DSHS File 17602-2010).

The Texas Department of State Health Services (the "department") received a request for a copy of complaint #1058-10-0163. You state you will release some of the responsive information to the requestor. You claim that portions of the submitted information are 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. 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 (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 for which the department claims the informer's privilege. You state that the marked information identifies an individual who reported possible violations under chapter 455 of the Occupations Code. *See* Occ. Code §§ 455.001-.353 (regulating the health profession of massage therapy). You also state that the possible violations were reported to the department, which is charged with enforcing the code. We understand that a violation of the code provision concerned is punishable by civil and criminal penalties. *See id.* §§ 455.301-.353. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude the department may withhold the complainant's identifying information, 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 you have marked does not identify a complainant for the purposes of the informer's privilege, and may not be withheld under section 552.101 on this basis.

You also raise section 552.101 in conjunction with the doctrines of common-law and constitutional privacy. Common-law privacy protects information that is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, such that its release would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) not of legitimate concern to the public. *See Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668 (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. *See id.* at 683. This office has found that some kinds of medical information or information indicating disabilities or specific illnesses are confidential under common-law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 470 (1987) (illness from severe emotional and job-related stress), 455 (1987) (prescription drugs, illnesses, operations, and physical handicaps).

Constitutional privacy consists of two interrelated types of privacy: (1) the right to make certain kinds of decisions independently and (2) an individual's interest in avoiding disclosure of personal matters. *See Whalen v. Roe*, 429 U.S. 589, 599-600 (1977); Open Records Decision Nos. 600 at 3-5 (1992), 478 at 4 (1987), 455 at 3-7. The first type protects an individual's autonomy within "zones of privacy" which include matters related to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relationships, and child rearing and education. ORD 455 at 4. The second type of constitutional privacy requires a balancing between the individual's privacy interests and the public's need to know information of public concern. *Id.* at 7. The scope of information protected is narrower than that under the common-law doctrine of privacy; constitutional privacy under section 552.101 is reserved for "the most intimate aspects of human affairs." *Id.* at 5 (quoting *Ramie v. City of Hedwig Village, Tex.*, 765 F.2d 490 (5th Cir. 1985)).

Upon review, we find that none of the remaining information at issue is highly intimate or embarrassing and not of legitimate interest to the public. Thus, the department may not withhold any of the information at issue under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy. Further, we find you have not demonstrated how any portion of the remaining information at issue falls within the zones of privacy or implicates an individual's privacy interests for purposes of constitutional privacy. Therefore, the department may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue under section 552.101 on the basis of constitutional privacy.

In summary, the department must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. The remaining 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](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,



Vanessa Burgess  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

VB/jb

Ref: ID#392413

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)