



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 20, 2011

Ms. T. Trisha Dang
Assistant City Attorney
City of Corpus Christi
P.O. Box 9277
Corpus Christi, Texas 78469-9277

OR2011-00956

Dear Ms. Dang:

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# 406425.

The Corpus Christi Police Department (the "department") received a request for case number 1008110123. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 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 information made confidential by other statutes, including section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides in relevant 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:

...

(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)(2)-(3). Upon review, we agree the submitted information consists of a report of alleged or suspected child abuse. *See id.* § 261.001(1)(E) (defining “abuse,” for the purposes of chapter 261 of the Family Code as including offense of sexual assault under Penal Code section 22.011); Penal Code § 22.011(c)(1) (defining “child” for purposes of Penal Code section 22.011 as person under 17 years of age). Accordingly, we determine the submitted report is within the scope of section 261.201 of the Family Code. However, the requestor is the parent of the child victim listed in the report, and the requestor is not alleged to have committed the alleged or suspected abuse. Therefore, the submitted report may not be withheld from this requestor on the basis of section 261.201(a). *See* Fam. Code § 261.201(k). Section 261.201(l)(3) of the Family Code states, however, the identity of the reporting party must be withheld when a governmental body releases information under section 261.201(k). *Id.* § 261.201(l)(3). We further note section 261.201(l)(2) states that any information excepted from required disclosure under the Act or other law must be withheld from disclosure. *Id.* § 261.201(l)(2). You assert the submitted report is excepted from public disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy and section 552.108 of the Government Code. Accordingly, we address these arguments for this report.

Section 552.101 also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which 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. *See Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). The type of information considered intimate or 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. Generally, only information that either identifies or tends to identify a victim of sexual assault or other sex-related offense must be withheld under common-law privacy. However, a governmental body is required to withhold an entire report when identifying information is inextricably intertwined with other releasable information or when the requestor knows the identity of the alleged victim. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 393 (1983), 339 (1982); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 440 (1986) (detailed descriptions of serious sexual offenses must be withheld). The submitted information reveals the requestor knows the identity of the alleged victim. Thus, withholding only the alleged victim's identifying information from the requestor would not preserve the victim's common-law right to privacy. However, as previously noted, the requestor is a parent of the minor child whose private information is at issue and therefore has a special right of access to information that would ordinarily be withheld to protect the minor's privacy interests. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(b) (governmental body may not deny access to person or person's representative to whom information relates on grounds that information is considered confidential under privacy principles). Therefore, the submitted report may not be withheld on the basis of common-law privacy.

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[.]" *Id.* § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body must reasonably explain how and why section 552.108 is applicable to the information at issue. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A); *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You inform us the submitted report relates to an active criminal case. Based on your representation and our review, we conclude that release of the submitted information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of a crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases), *writ ref'd per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Therefore, section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code is generally applicable to the submitted information.

We note 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). Section 552.108(c) refers to the basic front-page information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *houston Chronicle*). Additionally, as previously noted, section 261.201(1)(3) of the Family Code states the identity of the reporting party must be

withheld. Fam. Code § 261.201(1)(3). Thus, with the exception of basic information, the department may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. However, in releasing basic information, the department must withhold the reporting party's identity under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(1)(3) of the Family Code.¹

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,



Amy L.S. Shipp
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ALS/tf

Ref: ID# 406425

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

¹We note that the requestor has a special right of access to the information being released in this instance. Because such information is confidential with respect to the general public, if the department receives another request for this information from a different requestor, the department must again seek a ruling from this office.