



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

December 19, 2011

Chief James S. Kelley  
Sweetwater Police Department  
P.O. Box 450  
Sweetwater, Texas 79556

OR2011-18650

Dear Chief Kelley:

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# 445142.

The Sweetwater Police Department (the "department") received a request for information involving a named individual. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 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."<sup>1</sup> Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception 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). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both elements of the test must be established. *Id.* at 681-82. A compilation of an individual's criminal history is highly embarrassing information, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person. *Cf. United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom*

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<sup>1</sup>This office will raise section 552.101 on behalf of a governmental body, as this section is a mandatory exception to disclosure. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.007, .352; Open Records Decision No. 674 at 3 n.4 (2001) (mandatory exceptions).

*of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (when considering prong regarding individual's privacy interest, court recognized distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of information and noted that individual has significant privacy interest in compilation of one's criminal history). We also find a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public. We note information related to an offense for which an individual is currently involved in the criminal justice system does not implicate privacy concerns. *Cf.* Gov't Code § 411.081(b).

The present request is for unspecified law enforcement records involving the named individual. Thus, this request requires the department to compile the individual's criminal history and thereby implicates her privacy interests. Therefore, to the extent the department maintains any information that depicts the named individual as a suspect, arrested person, or criminal defendant, the department must withhold any such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. We note you have submitted information that does not depict the named individual as a suspect, arrested person, or criminal defendant. That information is not a compilation of the individual's criminal history and may not be withheld on that basis under section 552.101 and 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 state the information at issue is related to a pending criminal investigation. Based on your representation, we conclude section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable in this instance. *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 n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976).

We note 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 offense and arrest information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88. The department must release basic information, including a detailed description of the offense, even if the information does not literally appear on the front page of an offense or arrest report. *See* Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). The department may withhold the rest of the information at issue under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

In summary, the department (1) must withhold any information it maintains that depicts the named individual as a suspect, arrested person, or criminal defendant under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy and (2) may withhold the information related to the pending investigation under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code, except for basic information under section 552.108(c).

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James W. Morris, III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

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

JWM/eb

Ref: ID# 445142

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)