



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 18, 2012

Ms. Cheryl K. Byles
Assistant City Attorney
City of Fort Worth
1000 Throckmorton Street
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2012-00865

Dear Ms. Byles:

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# 442749 (PIR No. W012715).

The City of Fort Worth (the "city") received a request for a specified incident report. You claim that 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 protected by other statutes, including section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides in part:

(a) Except as provided by Section 261.203, the following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, 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:

(1) any personally identifiable information about a victim or witness under 18 years of age unless that victim or witness is:

(A) the child who is the subject of the report;
or

(B) another child of the parent, managing conservator,
or other legal representative requesting the
information;

(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). Upon review, we find the submitted information was used or developed in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse under chapter 261 of the Family Code. *See id.* § 261.001(1)(E) (defining “abuse,” for purposes of Fam. Code ch. 261, as including offense of sexual assault under Penal Code § 22.011); *see also* Penal Code § 21.011 (defining “child” for purposes of section 21.011 as a minor younger than 17 years of age). We therefore conclude the submitted information is generally confidential under section 261.201.

We note the requestor may be a parent of the child who is listed as the victim of the alleged or suspected abuse. Moreover, the requestor is not alleged to have committed the abuse. Therefore, the submitted information may not be withheld from this requestor, if she is the child's parent, on the basis of section 261.201(a). *See* Fam. Code § 261.201(k). In this instance, however, the submitted information uses a pseudonym to identify the child. Thus, we are unable to determine whether the requestor is the child's parent. Accordingly, we rule conditionally. Thus, if the requestor is not the child's parent, then the city must withhold the submitted information in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a) of the Family Code.

If the requestor is a parent of the child victim, then the city may not use section 261.201(a) to withhold the information at issue from this requestor. *Id.* However, section 261.201(1)(2) states any information that is excepted from required disclosure under the Act or other law may still be withheld from disclosure. *Id.* § 261.201(1)(2). Thus, because you also assert section 552.108 of the Government Code for the submitted information, we will address your argument under this section.

Section 552.108(a)(1) 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[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body claiming section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state, and have submitted an affidavit confirming, the submitted information relates to an open and pending criminal investigation with the city's police department. Based on this representation, we conclude the release of this information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of 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 n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the submitted information.

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). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*, and includes the identification and description of the complainant. *See* Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). In this instance, the complainant is also the reporting party for purposes of section 261.201 of the Family Code. Section 261.201(1)(3) of the Family Code states the reporting party's identity must be redacted. *See* Fam. Code § 261.201(1)(3). Thus, with the exception of basic information, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. However, in releasing basic information, the city 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.

In summary, if the requestor is not a parent of the child, then the city must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code. If the requestor is a parent of the child, then with the exception of basic information, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. In releasing the basic information, the city 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.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Casterline", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Sarah Casterline
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SEC/ag

Ref: ID# 442749

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)