



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

January 31, 2012

Ms. Patricia Fleming  
Assistant General Counsel  
Texas Department of Criminal Justice  
Office of the General Counsel  
P.O. Box 4004  
Huntsville, Texas 77342-4004

OR2012-01553

Dear Ms. Fleming:

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# 443968.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for documents pertaining to correspondence incoming to and outgoing from a named inmate during a specified time period. 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.

Initially, we note you have marked the responsive information. Thus, the remaining information is not responsive. This ruling does not address the public availability of non-responsive information, and the department need not release such information in response to the request.

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 constitutional privacy, which 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. Open Records Decision No. 455 at 4 (1987). 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. *Id.* 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.* The scope of information protected is narrower than that under the common-law doctrine of privacy; the information must concern the “most intimate aspects of human affairs.” *Id.* at 5 (citing *Ramie v. City of Hedwig Village, Texas*, 765 F.2d 490 (5th Cir. 1985)).

This office has applied privacy to protect certain information about incarcerated individuals. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 430 (1985), 428 (1985), 185 (1978). Citing *State v. Ellefson*, 224 S.E.2d 666 (S.C. 1976), as authority, this office held those individuals who correspond with inmates possess a “first amendment right . . . to maintain communication with [the inmate] free of the threat of public exposure.” This office ruled this right would be violated by the release of information that identifies those correspondents because such a release would discourage correspondence. *See* ORD 185. The information at issue in this ruling was the identities of individuals who had corresponded with inmates. In Open Records Decision No. 185, our office found that “the public’s right to obtain an inmate’s correspondence list is not sufficient to overcome the first amendment right of the inmate’s correspondents to maintain communication with him free of the threat of public exposure.” *Id.* Implicit in this holding is the fact that an individual’s association with an inmate may be intimate or embarrassing. In Open Records Decision Nos. 428 and 430, our office determined inmate visitor and mail logs that identify inmates and those who choose to visit or correspond with inmates are protected by constitutional privacy because people who correspond with inmates have a First Amendment right to do so that would be threatened if their names were released. ORD 430. Further, we recognized inmates had a constitutional right to visit with outsiders and could also be threatened if their names were released. *See also* ORD 185. The rights of those individuals to anonymity was found to outweigh the public’s interest in this information. *Id.*; *see* ORD 430 (list of inmate visitors protected by constitutional privacy of both inmate and visitors). Accordingly, the department must withhold the responsive information you have marked in the mail logs, and the information we have marked in the denial forms and decision forms, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with constitutional privacy. However, we find you have failed to demonstrate the remaining information in the denial forms and decision forms is protected under the doctrine of constitutional privacy, and it may not be withheld on that basis. As you raise no further exceptions to disclosure, the remaining information in the denial forms and decision forms 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](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 'Nneka Kanu', with a small horizontal line at the end.

Nneka Kanu  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

NK/em

Ref: ID# 443968

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)