



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 15, 2012

Mr. David K. Walker
County Attorney
Open Records Division
Montgomery County
207 West Phillips Street, Suite 100
Conroe, Texas 77301

OR2012-07136

Dear Mr. Walker:

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# 453558.

The Montgomery County Precinct 1 Constable's Office (the "constable's office") received a request for information related to a specified offense and a named individual. You claim that the requested 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. We have also considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

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. This section encompasses information protected by section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides in relevant part:

[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.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). You claim the submitted information pertains to an investigation under chapter 261 of the Family Code. *See id.* § 261.001(1)(E) (defining “abuse” for purposes of ch. 261 of Fam. Code as including offense of sexual assault under section 22.011 of Penal Code); *see also* Penal Code § 22.011 (defining “child” for purposes of sexual assault of child as person under seventeen years of age). Upon review, we find none of the victims was under seventeen years of age at the time of the alleged abuse; thus, section 261.201 is inapplicable. Therefore, the department may not withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.

Section 552.108 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[.]” Gov’t Code § 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); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977).

You have provided an affidavit from the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office (the “district attorney’s office”) explaining that the requested information is related to a pending criminal prosecution. The district attorney’s office states that release of the submitted information would interfere with the pending criminal prosecution. Based on these representations and our review, we conclude the release of the submitted 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 is applicable to the submitted information.

However, 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*. *See Open Records Decision No. 127* (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). We note

basic information includes, among other items, the identification and description of the complainant and a detailed description of the offense, but does not include identifying information of a witness or of a victim, unless the victim is also the complainant. *See id.* at 3-4. Thus, with the exception of basic information, the constable's office may generally withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.¹

Next, we must address whether the requestor has a right of access to the information subject to section 552.108(a)(1). In this instance, the requestor is an investigator for the Texas Education Agency ("TEA"), which has assumed the duties of the State Board for Educator Certification (the "SBEC").² Section 22.082 of the Education Code provides that the SBEC "may obtain from any law enforcement or criminal justice agency all criminal history record information ["CHRI"] and all records contained in any closed criminal investigation file that relate to a specific applicant for or holder of a certificate issued under Subchapter B, Chapter 21 [of the Education Code]." Educ. Code § 22.082. Section 411.090 of the Government Code grants the SBEC a right of access to obtain CHRI from the Texas Department of Public Safety (the "DPS") regarding persons who have applied to the SBEC. *See Gov't Code* § 411.090. Additionally, section 411.0901 of the Government Code specifically provides TEA with a right of access to obtain CHRI maintained by the DPS regarding certain school employees or applicants for employment. *See id.* § 411.0901. Pursuant to section 411.087 of the Government Code, an agency entitled to obtain CHRI from the DPS also is authorized to "obtain from any other criminal justice agency in this state [CHRI] maintained by that [agency]." *Id.* § 411.087(a)(2). CHRI consists of "information collected about a person by a criminal justice agency that consists of identifiable descriptions and notations of arrests, detentions, indictments, information, and other formal criminal charges and their dispositions." *Id.* § 411.082(2).

We find, when read together, sections 22.082 of the Education Code and 411.087 of the Government Code give TEA a statutory right of access to portions of the submitted information. *Cf. Brookshire v. Houston Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 508 S.W.2d 675, 678-79 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1974, no writ) (when legislature defines term in one statute and uses same term in relation to same subject matter in latter statute, later use of term is same as previously defined). Thus, we conclude the constable's office must release to this requestor information that shows the types of allegations made and whether there was an arrest, information, indictment, detention, conviction, or other formal charges and their dispositions. *See Open Records Decision No. 451 at 4* (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exceptions to disclosure under Act); *see also Collins v. Tex Mall, L.P.*, 297 S.W.3d 409, 415 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2009, no pet.) (statutory

¹As we make this determination, we need not address your claim under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

²The 79th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1116, which required the transfer of SBEC's administrative functions and services to the TEA, effective September 1, 2005.

provision controls and preempts common law only when statute directly conflicts with common law principle); *CenterPoint Energy Houston Elec. LLC v. Harris County Toll Rd.*, 436 F.3d 541, 544 (5th Cir. 2006) (common law controls only where there is no conflicting or controlling statutory law). With the exception of basic information, the constable's office may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government 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,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/dls

Ref: ID# 453558

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)