



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 22, 2012

Ms. Lillian Guillen Graham
Assistant City Attorney
City of Mesquite
P.O. Box 850137
Mesquite, Texas 75185-0137

OR2012-07771

Dear Ms. Graham:

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# 458323.

The Mesquite Police Department (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You claim portions of the requested information are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We note you seek to withhold, in part, a Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") number generated by the FBI. In Open Records Letter No. 2012-07334 (2012), this office issued a previous determination to the department authorizing the department to withhold FBI numbers under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code, without requesting a decision from this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(a); Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (listing elements of second type of previous determination under section 552.301(a) of the Government Code). As such, the department must withhold the FBI number you have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code in accordance with the previous determination issued to the department in Open Records Letter No. 2012-07334.

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 the common-law informer’s privilege, which has long been recognized by Texas courts. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969); *Hawthorne v. State*, 10 S.W.2d 724, 725 (Tex. Crim. App. 1928). The privilege protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law enforcement authority, provided the subject of the information does not already know the informer’s identity. Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1988), 208 at 1-2 (1978). The informer’s privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar law-enforcement agencies, as well as those who report violations of statutes with civil or criminal penalties to “administrative officials having a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres.” Open Records Decision No. 279 at 2 (1981) (citing 8 John H. Wigmore, *Evidence in Trials at Common Law* § 2374, at 767 (J. McNaughton rev. ed. 1961)). The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4-5. You state the information you have marked identifies an individual who reported a possible violation of the law to the department, which has the authority to enforce criminal law. The submitted information does not indicate the offender knows the identity of the reporting party. Thus, we conclude the department may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer’s privilege.

In summary, the department must withhold the FBI number you have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code in accordance with the previous determination issued to the department in Open Records Letter No. 2012-07334. The department may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer’s privilege. The department must release the remaining information.¹

¹We note the information being released contains the requestor’s driver’s license and license plate numbers, which are generally confidential under section 552.130 of the Government Code. However, because section 552.130 protects personal privacy, the requestor has a right to her own information under section 552.023 of the Government Code. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.023(a); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individual requests information concerning herself). Section 552.130(c) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact information protected by section 552.130(a)(1) without the necessity of requesting a decision under the Act. Gov’t Code § 552.130(c). Thus, if the department receives another request for this same information from a person who does not have such a right of access, section 552.130(c) authorizes the department to redact the driver’s license number. We also note this office issued Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009), a previous determination authorizing all governmental bodies to withhold ten categories of information, including a Texas license plate number under section 552.130, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.

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 cursive script that reads "Tamara H. Holland".

Tamara H. Holland
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

THH/ag

Ref: ID# 458323

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)