



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 11, 2013

Mr. Stuart Hughes
Assistant County Attorney
Open Records Division
Montgomery County
207 West Phillips, Suite 100
Conroe, Texas 77301

OR2013-04064

Dear Mr. Hughes:

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# 484968 (ORR# 2013-0695).

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Department (the "department") received a request for a specified report. You claim 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.

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 made confidential by other statutes, including section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides in relevant part:

(a) [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.

...

(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:

...

(2) any information that is excepted from required disclosure under [the Act], or other law[.].

Fam. Code § 261.201(a), (k), (l)(2). Upon review, we find the submitted information consists of files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, or working papers used or developed in an investigation under chapter 261. *See id.* §§ 261.001 (defining “abuse” for purposes of chapter 261 of the Family Code), 101.003(a) (defining “child” for purposes of this section as person under 18 years of age who is not and has not been married or who has not had the disabilities of minority removed for general purposes). Accordingly, we determine the submitted information is confidential under section 261.201 of the Family Code. However, the requestor is a parent of the child victim listed in the submitted report and is not alleged to have committed the alleged abuse. Therefore, the department may not withhold the submitted information from this requestor on the basis of section 261.201(a). *See id.* § 261.201(k). In addition, section 261.201(l)(2) provides any information excepted from required disclosure under the Act or other law must be withheld from disclosure. *Id.* § 261.201(l)(2). You assert the submitted information is excepted from public disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. Accordingly, we address your arguments.

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[.]” 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 the submitted information relates to a pending criminal case. You have provided an affidavit from the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office stating release of the information at issue would interfere with investigation or prosecution of the case. Based on these representations and our review, we find the release of the information at issue would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ’g Co. v. Sheriff’s office 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).

As you acknowledge, 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 information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). Thus, with the exception of basic information, the department may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

Lastly, we understand the department to claim some of the basic information is protected by common-law privacy. Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy. Common-law privacy protects information that is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, such that its release would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) not of legitimate concern to the public. *See Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668 (Tex. 1976). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both prongs of this test must be satisfied. *See id.* at 681-82.

This office has found common-law privacy generally protects the identifying information of a juvenile victim of abuse or neglect. *See* Open Records Decision No. 394 (1983); *cf.* Fam. Code § 261.201. Although the department would ordinarily be required to withhold some of the basic information pertaining to the child victim, as previously noted, the requestor is a parent of the child victim listed in the submitted report. As such, the requestor has a right of access under section 552.023 of the Government Code to information the department would be required to withhold from the public to protect his minor child’s privacy. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.023; Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individual requests information concerning himself). Accordingly, the

department may not withhold any of the basic information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

In summary, with the exception of basic information, which the department must release, the department may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.¹

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# 484968

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

¹We note the requestor has a special right of access to the basic information being released in this instance. *See* Fam. Code § 261.201(k); Gov't Code § 552.023. Because such information is confidential with respect to the general public, if the department receives another request for this information from a different requestor, the department must again seek a ruling from this office.