



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 27, 2014

Ms. Leticia D. McGowan
School Attorney
Dallas Independent School District
3700 Ross Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75204

OR2014-11059

Dear Ms. McGowan:

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# 527224.

The Dallas Independent School District (the "district") received a request for information regarding performance evaluations pertaining to a named employee during specified years, the named employee's personnel file, video recordings of hallway activities at a specified school during a specified time period, and job descriptions and responsibilities for a specified position. You inform us you will release some of the requested information to the requestor. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.135 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

The United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office has informed this office that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), section 1232g of title 20 of the United States Code, does not permit state and local educational authorities to disclose to this office, without parental consent, unredacted, personally identifiable information contained in education records for the purpose of our review in the open records

ruling process under the Act.¹ Consequently, state and local educational authorities that receive a request for education records from a member of the public under the Act must not submit education records to this office in unredacted form, that is, in a form in which “personally identifiable information” is disclosed. *See* 34 C.F.R. § 99.3 (defining “personally identifiable information”). You have submitted unredacted education records for our review. Because our office is prohibited from reviewing these education records to determine whether appropriate redactions under FERPA have been made, we will not address the applicability of FERPA to any of the submitted records. Such determinations under FERPA must be made by the educational authority in possession of the education records.² We will, however, address the applicability of the claimed exceptions to the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code exempts 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 section 261.201(a) of the Family Code, which states the following:

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.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a); *see also id.* §§ 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), 261.001(1), (4) (defining “abuse” and “neglect” for purposes of Family Code chapter 261). You claim the

¹A copy of this letter may be found on the Office of the Attorney General’s website: http://www.oag.state.tx.us/opinopen/og_resources.shtml.

²In the future, if the district does obtain parental consent to submit unredacted education records and the district seeks a ruling from this office on the proper redaction of those education records in compliance with FERPA, we will rule accordingly.

information at issue is confidential under section 261.201. We note the district is not an agency authorized to conduct an investigation under chapter 261 of the Family Code. *See id.* § 261.103 (listing agencies that may conduct child abuse investigations). You state the information was obtained from the Dallas Police Department, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (“DFPS”), or the district’s police department (the “department”). You also state the district has on staff an employee who is shared with DFPS to receive and investigate child abuse claims. Upon review, we find some of the submitted information consists of reports of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect of children made to DFPS. Therefore, this information, which we have marked, is confidential under section 261.201(a) of the Family Code, and the district must withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code. However, the remaining information was not obtained from the Dallas Police Department, DFPS, or the department, but instead relates to administrative investigations by the district. Thus, we find you have failed to demonstrate any of the remaining information was used or developed in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse, or consists of a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect under chapter 261 of the Family Code. Therefore, the remaining information is not confidential under section 261.201 of the Family Code, and the district may not withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 261.101(d) of the Family Code, which provides the identity of an individual making a report under chapter 261 is confidential. *See id.* § 261.101(d). As noted above, the district is not an agency authorized to conduct a chapter 261 investigation. *See id.* § 261.103 (listing agencies that may conduct child abuse investigations). We have marked the identifying information of an individual who made a report to DFPS. Therefore, the district must withhold the identifying information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.101(d) of the Family Code. However, we find none of the remaining information contains the identifying information of an individual who made a report under chapter 261. Accordingly, the district may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 on that basis.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information that is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person and (2) not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both prongs of this test must be satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. Types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court are delineated in *Industrial Foundation*. *Id.* at 683. This office has also found that common-law privacy generally protects the identifying information of juvenile victims of abuse or neglect. *See Open Records Decision No. 394 (1983); cf. Fam. Code § 261.201.* We note the submitted information contains the identifying information of juvenile victims of abuse and

other information which satisfies the standard articulated in *Industrial Foundation*. Accordingly, the district must withhold the names, student identification numbers, and names of the parents of the juvenile victims in the submitted information and the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.135 of the Government Code provides in part the following:

(a) "Informer" means a student or former student or an employee or former employee of a school district who has furnished a report of another person's or persons' possible violation of criminal, civil, or regulatory law to the school district or the proper regulatory enforcement authority.

(b) An informer's name or information that would substantially reveal the identity of an informer is excepted from [required public disclosure].

(c) Subsection (b) does not apply:

(1) if the informer is a student or former student, and the student or former student, or the legal guardian, or spouse of the student or former student consents to disclosure of the student's or former student's name; or

(2) if the informer is an employee or former employee who consents to disclosure of the employee's or former employee's name; or

(3) if the informer planned, initiated, or participated in the possible violation.

Gov't Code § 552.135(a)-(c). Because the legislature limited the protection of section 552.135 to the identity of a person who reports a possible violation of "law," a school district that seeks to withhold information under that exception must clearly identify to this office the specific civil, criminal, or regulatory law that is alleged to have been violated. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A). Additionally, individuals who provide information in the course of an investigation, but do not make the initial report are not informants for purposes of section 552.135. We also note parents of students are not informants for purposes of section 552.135. You state the remaining information identifies students and employees who reported alleged violations of criminal and civil laws. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude the district may withhold the information we have marked under section 552.135 of the Government Code. However, the district has failed to demonstrate how any of the remaining information at issue reveals the identity of an informer for

purposes of section 552.135. Therefore, the district may not withhold the remaining information on that ground.

We note some of the remaining information may be subject to section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code.³ Section 552.117(a)(1) excepts from disclosure the home addresses and telephone numbers, emergency contact information, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body who request this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. *Id.* § 552.117(a)(1). Whether a particular piece of information is protected by section 552.117 must be determined at the time the request for it is made. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). Therefore, the district may only withhold information under section 552.117(a)(1) on behalf of current or former officials or employees who made a request for confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date on which the request for this information was made. Accordingly, to the extent the employees at issue timely elected to keep such information confidential under section 552.024, the district must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code. If the employees did not make a timely election under section 552.024, the district may not withhold the information we have marked under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code.

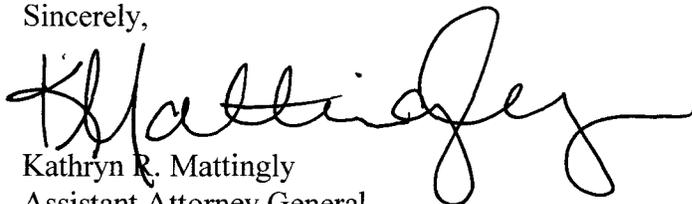
In summary, the district must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code. The district must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.101(d) of the Family Code. The district must withhold the names, student identification numbers, and names of the parents of the juvenile victims in the submitted information and the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The district must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.135 of the Government Code. To the extent the employees at issue timely elected to keep such information confidential under section 552.024, the district must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code. The district must release the remaining information 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.

³The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Mattingly', written in a cursive style.

Kathryn R. Mattingly
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KRM/bhf

Ref: ID# 527224

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)