



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

August 14, 2014

Ms. Josette Flores  
Assistant City Attorney  
Office of the City Attorney  
City of El Paso  
P.O. Box 1890  
El Paso, Texas 79950-1890

OR2014-14297

Dear Ms. Flores:

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# 532827.

The City of El Paso (the "city") received a request for three specified animal control report numbers.<sup>1</sup> You claim some of the requested 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.

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. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege, which Texas courts have long recognized. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969). The informer's privilege protects the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority, provided that the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1988), 208 at 1-2 (1978)*. The privilege protects the identities of individuals who report

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<sup>1</sup>We note the city received clarification regarding this request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.222(b) (governmental body may communicate with requestor for purpose of clarifying or narrowing request for information).

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.” See 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 (1988). The privilege excepts the informer’s statement only to the extent necessary to protect the informer’s identity. See Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990).

You state the submitted information reveals the identities of complainants who reported possible violations of section 7.08.030 of the City of El Paso Code to the city’s police department and/or the city’s ordinance enforcement personnel. You explain the alleged violation is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to two thousand dollars. You also inform us that you have no indication that the subject of the complaint knows the identities of the complainants. Based on your representation and our review, we conclude the city may withhold the identifying information of the complainants, which we have marked, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer’s privilege. See Open Records Decision No. 156 (1977) (name of person who makes complaint about another individual to city’s animal control division is excepted by informer’s privilege so long as information furnished discloses potential violation of state law). The remaining information must be released.

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl\\_ruling\\_info.shtml](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,



Paige Lay  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

PL/som

Ref: ID# 532827

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)