



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 3, 2016

Mr. Jim Wheeler
Criminal District Attorney
Wood County
P.O. Box 689
Quitman, Texas 75783

OR2016-02595

Dear Mr. Wheeler:

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# 596492.

The Wood County Sheriff's Department (the "sheriff's department") received a request for all information related to a named individual. You state the sheriff's department has released some of the requested information. You claim some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, 552.130, and 552.147 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 public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses 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. This office has found a compilation of an individual's criminal history is highly embarrassing information, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person. *Cf. United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (when considering prong regarding

individual's privacy interest, court recognized distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of information and noted that individual has significant privacy interest in compilation of one's criminal history). Furthermore, we find a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public. However, information that refers to an individual solely as a victim, witness, or involved person is not a compilation of the individual's criminal history and may not be withheld under section 552.101 on that basis.

The present request seeks all reports pertaining to a named individual. This request requires the sheriff's department to compile the named individual's criminal history and implicates the named individual's right to privacy. Therefore, to the extent the sheriff's department maintains law enforcement records listing the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the sheriff's department must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

We note the sheriff's department has submitted information that does not list the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant. This information does not consist of a compilation of the named individual's criminal history, and the sheriff's department may not withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy on that basis. Accordingly, we will address the applicability of other exceptions to disclosure of this information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses information protected by section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides, in part, as follows:

(a) [T]he 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). The information at issue consists of an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect conducted by the sheriff's department. *See 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 chapter 261 of the Family Code). Accordingly, we find this information is subject to chapter 261 of the Family Code. You do not indicate the sheriff’s department has adopted a rule that governs the release of this type of information. Therefore, we assume no such regulation exists. Given that assumption, we conclude the sheriff’s department must withhold the information at issue, which we have marked, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.¹ See Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (predecessor statute).

In summary, to the extent the sheriff’s department maintains law enforcement records listing the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the sheriff’s department must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The sheriff’s department must withhold the information we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family 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.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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/sb

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of the submitted information.

Ref: ID# 596492

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)