



KEN PAXTON  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 18, 2016

Mr. Nicholas Toulet  
Assistant City Attorney  
City Attorney's Office  
City of Midland  
P.O. Box 1152  
Midland, Texas 79702

OR2016-18656

Dear Mr. Toulet:

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# 629336 (ORR# 20065).

The Midland Police Department (the "department") received a request for information related to a specified motor vehicle accident. You state the department has released some of the requested information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note a portion of the submitted information is subject to chapter 550 of the Transportation Code. Section 550.065 applies only to a written report of an accident required under section 550.061, 550.062, or 601.004. *See* Transp. Code § 550.065(a)(1). Chapter 550 requires the creation of a written report when the accident resulted in injury to or the death of a person or damage to the property of any person to the apparent extent of \$1,000 or more. Transp. Code §§ 550.061 (operator's accident report), .062 (officer's accident report). An accident report is privileged and for the confidential use of the Texas Department of Transportation or a local governmental agency of Texas that has use for the information for accident prevention purposes. *Id.* § 550.065(b). However, a governmental entity may release an accident report in accordance with subsections (c) and (c-1). *Id.*

§ 550.065(c), (c-1). Section 550.065(c) provides a governmental entity shall release an accident report to a person or entity listed under this subsection. *Id.* § 550.065(c).

In this instance, the requestor is a person listed under section 550.065(c). Although the department asserts section 552.108 to withhold the information, a statutory right of access prevails over the Act's general exceptions to public disclosure. *See, e.g.,* Open Records Decision Nos. 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exception to disclosure under the Act). Because section 552.108 is a general exception under the Act, the requestor's statutory access under section 550.065(c) prevails and the department may not withhold the information under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Thus, the department must release the accident report to this requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c) of the Transportation Code.

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(a)(1) must 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 remaining information relates to an active investigation or prosecution. Generally, the release of information pertaining to an open case is presumed to interfere with the criminal investigation. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases). We note, however, the information at issue includes a DIC-24 Statutory Warning and a DIC-25 Notice of Suspension. The Statutory Warning and Notice of Suspension have previously been provided to the arrestee. Because copies of these documents have previously been released to the arrestee, we find, and you acknowledge, release of the documents will not interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime, and these documents may not be withheld under section 552.108(a)(1). *See* Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). Because the remaining information at issue has not been previously released, we conclude release of this information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. Thus, we find section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the remaining information at issue.

However, we note, and 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). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Thus, with the exception of the basic information, the department may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

We note portions of the Statutory Warning and Notice of Suspension are subject to sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> 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 the doctrine of common-law privacy. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). Under the common-law right of privacy, an individual has a right to be free from the publicizing of private affairs in which the public has no legitimate concern. *Id.* at 682. In considering whether a public citizen’s date of birth is private, the Third Court of Appeals looked to the supreme court’s rationale in *Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts v. Attorney General of Texas*, 354 S.W.3d 336 (Tex. 2010). *Paxton v. City of Dallas*, No. 03-13-00546-CV, 2015 WL 3394061, at \*3 (Tex. App.—Austin May 22, 2015, pet. denied) (mem. op.). The supreme court concluded public employees’ dates of birth are private under section 552.102 of the Government Code because the employees’ privacy interest substantially outweighed the negligible public interest in disclosure.<sup>2</sup> *Texas Comptroller*, 354 S.W.3d at 347-48. Based on *Texas Comptroller*, the court of appeals concluded the privacy rights of public employees apply equally to public citizens, and thus, public citizens’ dates of birth are also protected by common-law privacy pursuant to section 552.101. *City of Dallas*, 2015 WL 3394061, at \*3. Thus, the department must withhold the public citizen’s date of birth within the Statutory Warning and Notice of Suspension under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code provides information relating to a motor vehicle operator’s license, driver’s license, motor vehicle title or registration, or personal identification document issued by an agency of this state or another state or country is excepted from public release. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.130. Accordingly, the department must withhold the motor vehicle record information within the Statutory Warning and Notice of Suspension under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, the department must release the accident report to this requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c) of the Transportation Code. The department must release the submitted Statutory Warning and Notice of Suspension; however, in releasing these documents, the department must withhold the date of birth of a member of the public under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy and must withhold the motor vehicle record information under section 552.130 of the Government Code. With the

---

<sup>1</sup>The Office of the Attorney General will raise mandatory exceptions on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

<sup>2</sup>Section 552.102(a) excepts from disclosure “information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” Gov’t Code § 552.102(a).

exception of the basic information, which must be released, the department may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government 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](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/som

Ref: ID# 629336

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)