



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 27, 2016

Mr. Thomas Gilliland
Public Information Officer
County of Harris
1200 Baker Street, 2nd Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2016-23984

Dear Mr. Gilliland:

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# 638153 (HCSO File No. 14SO6001276).

The Harris County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for a specified report. You claim the submitted 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. Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as section 261.201 of the Family Code. Section 261.201 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:

(1) any personally identifiable information about a victim or witness under 18 years of age unless that victim or witness is:

(A) the child who is the subject of the report; or

(B) another child of the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative requesting the information[.]

Fam. Code § 261.201(a), (k), (l)(1). We agree the submitted report was used or developed in an investigation of alleged child abuse under chapter 261. *See id.* §§ 101.003(a) (defining “child” for purposes of section 261.201 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) (defining “abuse” for purposes of chapter 261 of the Family Code). Therefore, the submitted information is generally confidential under section 261.201(a) of the Family Code. In this instance, however, the requestor is a parent of one of the child victims listed in the report and is not alleged to have committed the abuse or neglect. Thus, he has a right of access to the submitted information under section 261.201(k), and the sheriff’s office may not use section 261.201(a) to withhold the submitted information from him. *See id.* § 261.201(k). However, section 261.201(l)(1) states the identity of any other child victim or witness must be redacted before a governmental body releases information under section 261.201(l). *See id.* § 261.201(l)(1). Therefore, the sheriff’s office must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction

with section 261.201(1)(1) of the Family Code. The remaining information must be released 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.

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,



Britni Ramirez
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BR/bhf

Ref: ID# 638153

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)