



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 3, 2016

Ms. Ann-Marie Sheely
Assistant County Attorney
County of Travis
P.O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767

OR2016-24516

Dear Ms. Sheely:

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# 633320.

The Travis County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney's office") received a request for records of a conversation between two named individuals related to a specified case. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.107(2) of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.²

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 confidentiality provisions

¹We note the district attorney's office did not comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting a ruling from this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b), (e). Nonetheless, because the exceptions you claim can provide compelling reasons to overcome the presumption of openness, we will consider their applicability to the submitted information. *See id.* §§ 552.007, .302, .352.

²We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

found in chapter 55 of the Code of Criminal Procedure for the requested information. Articles 55.01 through 55.05 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provide for the expunction of criminal records in certain limited circumstances. Article 55.03 prescribes the effect of an expunction order and provides:

When the order of expunction is final:

- (1) the release, maintenance, dissemination, or use of the expunged records and files for any purpose is prohibited;
- (2) except as provided in Subdivision (3) of this article, the person arrested may deny the occurrence of the arrest and the existence of the expunction order; and
- (3) the person arrested or any other person, when questioned under oath in a criminal proceeding about an arrest for which the records have been expunged, may state only that the matter in question has been expunged.

Crim. Proc. Code art. 55.03. Article 55.04 imposes sanctions for violations of an expunction order and provides in part:

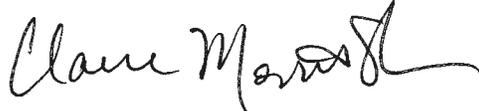
Sec. 1. A person who acquires knowledge of an arrest while an officer or employee of the state or of any agency or other entity of the state or any political subdivision of the state and who knows of an order expunging the records and files relating to that arrest commits an offense if he knowingly releases, disseminates, or otherwise uses the records or files.

Id. art. 55.04, § 1. This office has determined records subject to an expunction order are not subject to public disclosure under the Act. *See* Open Records Decision No. 457 at 2 (1987) (governmental body prohibited from releasing or disseminating arrest records subject to expunction order, as “those records are not subject to public disclosure under the [Act]”). You inform us the requested information is the subject of an expunction order, and you seek to withhold that information under article 55.03 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. You have submitted an expunction order pertaining to the requested information. Thus, we agree the requested information is confidential under article 55.03 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the district attorney’s office must withhold it on that basis under section 552.101 of the Government Code. As we are able to make this determination, we do not address your remaining argument against disclosure of the requested information.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Claire V. Morris Sloan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a stylized "S" at the end.

Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/som

Ref: ID# 633320

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)