



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 29, 2012

Ms. M. Ann Montgomery-Moran
Assistant County & District Attorney
Ellis County
109 South Jackson
Waxahachie, Texas 75165

OR2012-08199

Dear Ms. Montgomery-Moran:

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# 458592.

The Ellis County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for all arrest and offense reports pertaining to a named individual. You claim 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 552.301 of the Government Code describes the procedural obligations placed on a governmental body that receives a written request for information it wishes to withhold. You acknowledge, and we agree, the sheriff's office failed to request a ruling from this office within ten business days as prescribed by section 552.301(b). *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Pursuant to section 552.302, a governmental body's failure to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption the requested information is public and must be released, unless the governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342, 350 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.302); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). A compelling reason exists when third-party interests are at stake or when information is confidential by law. Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977). Because the applicability of section 552.101 can be a compelling reason to withhold information from disclosure, we will consider your argument under that exception.

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, which protects information if it (1) contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) is 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 established. *Id.* at 681-82. 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. U. S. Dep’t of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (finding significant privacy interest in compilation of individual’s criminal history by recognizing distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of criminal history information). Furthermore, we find a compilation of a private citizen’s criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public. The request requires the sheriff’s office to compile unspecified law enforcement records concerning the named individual. We find such a request for unspecified law enforcement records implicates this individual’s right to privacy. Therefore, to the extent the sheriff’s office maintains unspecified law enforcement records depicting this named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the sheriff’s office must withhold such information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

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.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, 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 must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Tamara H. Holland
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

THH/ag

Ref: ID# 458592

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)