



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 9, 2015

Mr. Matthew L. Grove
Assistant County Attorney
County of Fort Bend
401 Jackson Street, 3rd Floor
Richmond, Texas 77469

OR2015-21211

Dear Mr. Grove:

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# 582692.

The Fort Bend County Animal Services Department (the "department") received a request for information related to cats turned in to the department and the names of individuals who used animal traps during a specified time period. You claim some of 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. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege, which Texas courts have long recognized. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969). The informer's privilege protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority. *See Open Records Decision No. 208 at 1-2 (1978)*. The informer's privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar law-enforcement agencies, as well as those who report violations of statutes with civil or criminal penalties to "administrative officials having a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres." *Open Records Decision No. 279 at 1-2 (1981)* (citing 8 John H. Wigmore, *Evidence in Trials at Common*

Law, § 2374, at 767 (J. McNaughton Rev. Ed. 1961)). The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4 (1988). However, witnesses who provide information in the course of an investigation but do not make a report of the violation are not informants for the purposes of claiming the informer's privilege. The privilege excepts the informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect that informer's identity. Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990). We note the informer's privilege does not apply where the informant's identity is known to the individual who is the subject of the complaint. *See* ORD 208 at 1-2.

You state portions of the submitted information identify complainants who reported violations of the "Fort Bend County Rules to Control Rabies" and Animal Control Regulations (the "county rules") to the department. You explain the department is responsible for enforcing the relevant portions of the county rules. You also state violations of the county rules carry civil or criminal penalties. Based upon your representations and our review, we conclude the department has demonstrated the applicability of the common-law informer's privilege to the information. Therefore, the department may withhold the identifying information of the complainants, consisting of each complainant's name, telephone number, and address, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. The department must release the remaining 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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/som

Ref: ID# 582692

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)