



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 10, 2016

Ms. Elisha Bird
Assistant District Attorney
35th Judicial District of Texas
200 South Broadway, Suite 323
Brownwood, Texas 76801

OR2016-18059

Dear Ms. Bird:

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# 622323.

The Brown County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received two requests for information pertaining to a specified case. You state the sheriff's office has released some responsive information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.1085 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note some of the submitted information, which we have marked, is not responsive to the instant requests because it was created after the requests were received. This ruling does not address the public availability of any information that is not responsive to the requests and the sheriff's office is not required to release such information in response to these requests.

Next, we note the responsive information includes sex offender registration information subject to article 62.005(b) of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101

¹We note section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.147(b).

encompasses article 62.051 of the Code of Criminal Procedure which requires a sex offender registrant to provide the following information for the Texas Department of Public Safety sex offender registration database: the person's full name; date of birth; sex; race; height; weight; eye color; hair color; social security number; driver's license number; shoe size; home address; each alias; home, work, or cellular telephone number; a recent color photograph, or if possible, an electronic image of the person; a complete set of fingerprints; the type of offense the person was convicted of; the age of the victim; the date of conviction; the punishment received; an indication as to whether the person is discharged, paroled, or released on juvenile probation, community supervision, or mandatory supervision; an indication of each license, as defined by article 62.005(g), that is held or sought by the person; an indication as to whether the person is or will be employed, carrying on a vocation, or a student at a particular public or private institution of higher education in this state or another state, and the name and address of that institution; the identification of any online identifier established or used by the person; and any other information required by the department. *See* Crim. Proc. Code art. 62.051(c). This information is public information with the exception of the person's social security number; driver's license number; home, work, or cellular telephone number; the identification of any online identifier established or used by the person; all information required by the Texas Department of Public Safety outside of the enumerated categories of information including any information regarding an employer's name, address, or telephone number; and any information that would identify the victim of the offense for which the person is subject to registration. *See id.* art. 62.005(b). Although you claim this information is excepted under section 552.108 of the Government Code, we note information specifically made public by statute may not be withheld under the general exceptions to public disclosure in the Act. *See e.g.*, Open Records Decision Nos. 544 (1990), 378 (1983), 161 (1977), 146 (1976). We also note statutes governing the release of specific information generally prevail over the common law. *See Collins v. Tex Mall, L.P.*, 297 S.W.3d 409, 415 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2009, no pet.) (statutory provision controls and preempts common law only when it directly conflicts with common-law principle); *see also Cash Am. Intern. Inc. v. Bennett*, 35 S.W.3d 12, 16 (Tex. 2000) (statute depriving person of common-law right will not be extended beyond its plain meaning or applied to cases not clearly within its purview). Thus, pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code, the sheriff's office must withhold or release the information we have marked in accordance with article 62.005(b) of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Further, we note the responsive information includes search warrants, which are court-filed documents. Section 552.022(a)(17) of the Government Code provides for required public disclosure of "information that is also contained in a public court record," unless the information is made confidential under the Act or other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(17). Although you seek to withhold this information, which we have marked, under section 552.108 of the Government Code, section 552.108 is a discretionary exception and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See id.* § 552.007; Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver). As a result, section 552.108 does not make information confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. Accordingly, the sheriff's office may not withhold the information subject to section 552.022(a)(17) under

section 552.108. Further, although you raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy for the court-filed documents, we note common-law privacy is not applicable to information contained in public records. *See Cox Broadcasting Corp. v. Cohn*, 420 U.S. 469, 496 (1975) (action for invasion of privacy cannot be maintained where information is in public domain); *Star-Telegram, Inc. v. Walker*, 834 S.W.2d 54, 57 (Tex. 1992) (law cannot recall information once in public domain). Thus, the sheriff's office may not withhold any portion of the court-filed documents under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy. As you raise no further exceptions to disclosure for this information, it must be released. However, we will consider your arguments against disclosure of the remaining responsive information.

Section 552.108(a) 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: (1) 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 information at issue 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, 710 (Tex. 1977). You state the remaining responsive information relates to a pending criminal investigation or prosecution. Based on this representation, we conclude the release of the remaining information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ’g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177, 186-87 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (delineating law enforcement interests present in active cases), *writ ref’d n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Therefore, section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the remaining responsive information.

However, 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 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). We note basic information includes an arrestee’s social security number, but does not include dates of birth. *See* ORD 127. Thus, with the exception of basic information, the sheriff’s office may withhold the remaining responsive information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.²

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information that is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) 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 satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. Types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court are delineated in *Industrial*

²As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address your other arguments to withhold this information.


Foundation. Id. at 683. Upon review, we find none of the basic information is highly intimate or embarrassing and of no legitimate public interest. Therefore, the sheriff's office may not withhold any of the basic information under section 552.101 of the Government Code on this basis.

In summary, pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code, the sheriff's office must withhold or release the information we have marked in accordance with article 62.005(b) of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The sheriff's office must release the court-filed documents we have marked pursuant to section 552.022(a)(17) of the Government Code. With the exception of basic information, which must also be released, the sheriff's office may withhold the remaining responsive 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, 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,



Brian E. Berget
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BB/akg

Ref: ID# 622323

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)