



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 26, 2016

Ms. Leticia D. McGowan
School Attorney
Dallas Independent School District
3700 Ross Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75204

OR2016-21690

Dear Ms. McGowan:

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# 627557 (ORR 15424).

The Dallas Independent School District (the "district") received a request for personnel information relating to a named former employee. You state you will release some information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.135 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office has informed this office the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), section 1232g of title 20 of the United States Code, does not permit state and local educational authorities to disclose to this office, without parental or an adult student's consent, unredacted, personally identifiable information contained in education records for the purpose of our review in the open records ruling process under the Act.¹ Consequently, state and local educational authorities that receive a request for education records from a member of the public under the Act must not submit education records to this office in unredacted form, that is, in a form in which "personally identifiable information" is

¹A copy of this letter may be found on the Office of the Attorney General's website at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/files/og/20060725usdoe.pdf>.

disclosed. *See* 34 C.F.R. § 99.3 (defining “personally identifiable information”). You have submitted unredacted education records for our review. Because our office is prohibited from reviewing education records, we will not address the applicability of FERPA to any of the submitted information. Such determinations under FERPA must be made by the educational authority in possession of such records. We will, however, consider the applicability of the claimed exceptions to the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov’t Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides, in part, the following:

(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.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a); *see id.* §§ 101.003(a) (defining “child” for purposes of chapter 261), 261.001(1), (4) (defining “abuse” and “neglect” for purposes of chapter 261 of the Family Code). You claim the submitted information is confidential under section 261.201. We note the district is not an agency authorized to conduct an investigation under chapter 261 of the Family Code. *See id.* § 261.103 (listing agencies that may conduct child abuse investigations). You state the information at issue was obtained from the Dallas Police Department (“DPD”), the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (“DFPS”), or the district’s police department (the “department”). You also state the district has on staff an employee who is shared with DFPS to receive and investigate child abuse claims. A portion of the submitted information consists of reports of alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect made to DFPS. Accordingly, we find the district must withhold this information, which we have marked, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a) of the Family Code.² Upon review, however, we find most of the remaining information was not obtained from DPD, DFPS, or the department, but instead relates to an administrative investigation by the district. We are unable to

²As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

determine, however, whether the submitted Follow-Up Child Abuse Reporting Forms (the “reporting forms”) were produced to DPD, DFPS, or the department. Accordingly, we must rule conditionally.

If the reporting forms were produced to DPD, DFPS, or the department, we find this information consists of information used or developed in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse under chapter 261. In that instance, the district must withhold the information at issue under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a)(2) of the Family Code. However, if the reporting forms were not produced to DPD, DFPS, or the department, then this information does not consist of information used or developed in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse under chapter 261 of the Family Code and it may not be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a)(2) of the Family Code.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 261.101 of the Family Code, which provides the identity of an individual making a report under chapter 261 is confidential. *See id.* § 261.101(d). As noted above, the district is not an agency authorized to conduct a chapter 261 investigation. *See id.* § 261.103 (listing agencies that may conduct child abuse investigations). Upon review, we find none of the remaining information consists of the identifying information of an individual who made a report under chapter 261 of the Family Code. Therefore, the district may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.101 of the Family Code.

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 Foundation*. *Id.* at 683. This office has found that common-law privacy generally protects the identifying information of juvenile victims of abuse or neglect. *See* Open Records Decision No. 394 (1983); *cf.* Fam. Code § 261.201. Upon review, we find some of the remaining information at issue identifies juvenile victims of abuse. Accordingly, the district must withhold the identifying information of the juvenile victims of abuse contained in the remaining information, to include the children’s names, student identification numbers, addresses and telephone numbers, and parents’ names, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.³

³As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure of this information.

Section 552.135 of the Government Code provides, in relevant part, the following:

(a) "Informer" means a student or a former student or an employee or former employee of a school district who has furnished a report of another person's possible violation of criminal, civil, or regulatory law to the school district or the proper regulatory enforcement authority.

(b) An informer's name or information that would substantially reveal the identity of an informer is excepted from [required public disclosure].

(c) Subsection (b) does not apply:

(1) if the informer is a student or former student, and the student or former student, or the legal guardian, or spouse of the student or former student consents to disclosure of the student's or former student's name; or

(2) if the informer is an employee or former employee who consents to disclosure of the employee's or former employee's name; or

(3) if the informer planned, initiated, or participated in the possible violation.

Gov't Code § 552.135(a), (b). Because the legislature limited the protection of section 552.135 to the identity of a person who reports a possible violation of "law," a school district that seeks to withhold information under that exception must clearly identify to this office the specific civil, criminal, or regulatory law that is alleged to have been violated. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A). We note section 552.135 protects an informer's identity, but it does not generally encompass protection for witnesses or witness statements. You state some of the remaining information identifies students and employees who reported alleged violations of criminal and civil laws. Upon review, we find the district must withhold the identifying information of the informers we have marked under section 552.135 of the Government Code. However, we find the district has not demonstrated the remaining information identifies an informer for the purposes of section 552.135 of the Government Code. Therefore, the district may not withhold the remaining information under section 552.135 of the Government Code.

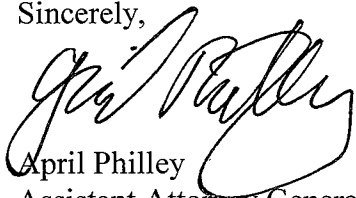
In summary, to the extent the district determines the requested information consists of "education records" that must be withheld under FERPA, the district must dispose of any such information in accordance with FERPA, rather than the Act. The district must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a)(2) of the Family Code. If the reporting forms were produced to DPD, DFPS, or the department, the district must withhold the reporting forms

under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a)(2) of the Family Code. The district must withhold the information that identifies the juvenile victims of abuse under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The district must withhold the identifying information of the informers we have indicated under section 552.135 of the Government Code. The district 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,



April Philley
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

AP/akg

Ref: ID# 627557

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)