



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 22, 2016

Mr. Robert Underwood  
Counsel for Panola County  
Underwood Law Office  
P.O. Box 1138  
Carthage, Texas 75633

OR2016-28289

Dear Mr. Underwood:

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# 637703.

The Panola County Criminal District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney's office"), which you represent, received two requests from different requestors for information pertaining to a specified incident. The district attorney's office claims the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted information. We have also considered comments submitted by one of the requestors. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

The submitted information contains court-filed documents that are subject to section 552.022(a)(17) of the Government Code, which provides the following:

Without limiting the amount or kind of information that is public information under this chapter, the following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

...

(17) information that is also contained in a public court record[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(17). Although the district attorney's office asserts the information subject to section 552.022 is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108, this section is discretionary and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See* Open Records Decision No. 177 (1977) (governmental body may waive statutory predecessor to section 552.108); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally). Therefore, the district attorney's office may not withhold the information subject to section 552.022 under section 552.108. However, sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code make information confidential under the Act.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, we will consider the applicability of these sections to the information at issue. Nonetheless, we will first address the arguments of the district attorney's office under section 552.108 of the Government Code for the remaining 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). Section 552.108 may be invoked by the proper custodian of information relating to an investigation or prosecution of criminal conduct. Open Records Decision No. 474 at 4-5 (1987). Where a governmental body possesses information relating to a pending case of another law enforcement agency, the governmental body may withhold the information under section 552.108(a)(1) if it demonstrates the information relates to the pending case and this office is provided with a representation from the law enforcement entity that the law enforcement entity wishes to withhold the information.

The district attorney's office has submitted documents showing the submitted information pertains to an investigation of an officer by the Texas Rangers and Texas Department Public Safety (“DPS”), and the district attorney's office presented the information at issue to a grand jury, which resulted in a no bill of indictment. The district attorney's office states the information pertaining to the Texas Rangers and DPS was presented to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (the “FBI”) and the Department of Justice (the “DOJ”) for review and investigation. The district attorney's office asserts the information “would be the basis for a federal investigation and prosecution of the officer if [the FBI and DOJ] investigation reveals federal laws were violated.” The district attorney's office also states “[t]he statute of limitations for any criminal offense has not run, and the investigation by federal agencies may possibly lead to new evidence [that] could be submitted to a subsequent grand jury.”

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<sup>1</sup>The Office of the Attorney General will raise mandatory exceptions on behalf of a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 at 2 (1987), 480 at 5 (1987).

Thus, the district attorney's office represents the information at issue is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108(a)(1) because its release would interfere with pending criminal investigations by the FBI and DOJ. However, as of the date of this letter, this office has not received a representation from the FBI or DOJ objecting to the release of the requested information.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the district attorney's office may not withhold any of the information at issue on that ground.

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 article 20.02(a) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which provides "[t]he proceedings of the grand jury shall be secret." Crim. Proc. Code art. 20.02(a). However, article 20.02 does not define "proceedings" for purposes of subsection (a). The Fourth Court of Appeals in the *In re Reed* decision addressed the issue of what constitutes "proceedings" for purposes of article 20.02(a) and stated the term "proceedings" could "reasonably be understood as encompassing matters that take place before the grand jury, such as witness testimony and deliberations." *In re Reed*, 227 S.W.3d 273, 276 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 2007, orig. proceeding).

Subsequent to the *Reed* decision, the 80th Legislature, modeling federal law, added subsection (h) to article 20.02. *See* Crim. Proc. Code art. 20.02; FED. R. CRIM. P. 6(e)(6) ("Records, orders, and subpoenas relating to grand-jury proceedings must be kept under seal to the extent and as long as necessary to prevent the unauthorized disclosure of a matter occurring before a grand jury."). Article 20.02(h) states, "[a] subpoena or summons relating to a grand jury proceeding or investigation must be kept secret to the extent and for as long as necessary to prevent the unauthorized disclosure of a matter before the grand jury." Crim. Proc. Code art. 20.02(h). However, this provision does not define or explain what factors to consider in making such a determination, and even if we considered article 20.02 to be a confidentiality provision, information withheld under this statute would be secret only "for as long as necessary to prevent the unauthorized disclosure of a matter before the grand jury." *Id.*

The district attorney's office seeks to withhold the submitted information, which pertains to a case in which the grand jury has returned a no bill of indictment, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with article 20.02 of the Criminal Code of Procedure. However, the district attorney's office has not submitted any arguments explaining how the matters upon which the submitted information were based are still "before the grand jury" to warrant keeping it secret. Therefore, upon review of article 20.02 and related case law, it is not apparent, and the district attorney's office has not otherwise explained, how this provision makes the submitted information confidential. *See* Open Records Decision No. 478 (1987) (as general rule, statutory confidentiality requires express language making

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<sup>2</sup>We note this office contacted the district attorney's office regarding this representation.

information confidential). Consequently, the district attorney's office may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with article 20.02 of the Criminal Code of Procedure.

The district attorney's office also raises section 552.101 in conjunction with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 for the information at issue. At the direction of Congress, the Secretary of Health and Human Services ("HHS") promulgated regulations setting privacy standards for medical records, which HHS issued as the Federal Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 1320d-2 (Supp. IV 1998) (historical & statutory note); Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information, 45 C.F.R. Pts. 160, 164 ("Privacy Rule"); *see also* Attorney General Opinion JC-0508 at 2 (2002). These standards govern the releasability of protected health information by a covered entity. *See* 45 C.F.R. pts. 160, 164. Under these standards, a covered entity may not use or disclose protected health information, excepted as provided by parts 160 and 164 of the Code of Federal Regulations. 45 C.F.R. § 164.502(a).

This office addressed the interplay of the Privacy Rule and the Act. Open Records Decision No. 681 (2004). In Open Records Decision No. 681, we noted section 164.512 of title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations provides a covered entity may use or disclose protected health information to the extent such use or disclosure is required by law and the use or disclosure complies with and is limited to the relevant requirements of such law. *Id.*; *see* 45 C.F.R. § 164.512(a)(1). We further noted the Act "is a mandate in Texas law that compels Texas governmental bodies to disclose information to the public." ORD 681 at 8; *see also* Gov't Code §§ 552.002, .003, .021. Therefore, we held the disclosures under the Act come within section 164.512(a). Consequently, the Privacy Rule does not make information confidential for the purpose of section 552.101 of the Government Code. *See Abbott v. Tex. Dep't of Mental Health & Mental Retardation*, 212 S.W.3d 648 (Tex. App.—Austin 2006, no pet.); ORD 681 at 9; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 478 at 2 (1987) (statutory confidentiality requires express language making information confidential). Because the Privacy Rule does not make confidential information that is subject to disclosure under the Act, the district attorney's office may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 11(a) of article 49.25 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which reads as follows:

The medical examiner shall keep full and complete records properly indexed, giving the name if known of every person whose death is investigated, the place where the body was found, the date, the cause and manner of death, and shall issue a death certificate. . . . The records may not be withheld, subject to a discretionary exception under [the Act], except that a photograph or x-ray

of a body taken during an autopsy is excepted from required public disclosure in accordance with [the Act], but is subject to disclosure:

- (1) under a subpoena or authority of other law; or
- (2) if the photograph or x-ray is of the body of a person who died while in the custody of law enforcement.

Crim. Proc. Code art. 49.25, § 11(a). The district attorney's office asserts the submitted photographs and x-rays of a body taken in connection with an autopsy are confidential under section 11(a). However, the individual at issue died while in the custody of law enforcement. *See id.* § 11(a)(2). Therefore, these photographs and x-rays are not confidential under section 11(a) of article 49.25 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the district attorney's office may not withhold them under section 552.101 on that ground.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the Medical Practice Act (the "MPA"), subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code. *See Occ. Code* §§ 151.001-168.202. Section 159.002 of the MPA provides in relevant part the following:

- (a) A communication between a physician and a patient, relative to or in connection with any professional services as a physician to the patient, is confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.
- (b) A record of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by a physician that is created or maintained by a physician is confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.
- (c) A person who receives information from a confidential communication or record as described by this chapter, other than a person listed in Section 159.004 who is acting on the patient's behalf, may not disclose the information except to the extent that disclosure is consistent with the authorized purposes for which the information was first obtained.

*Id.* § 159.002(a)-(c). Information subject to the MPA includes both medical records and information obtained from those records. *See id.* §§ 159.002, .004. This office has found, when a file is created as the result of a hospital stay, all the documents in the file relating to diagnosis and treatment constitute physician-patient communications or "[r]ecords of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by a physician that are created or maintained by a physician." Open Records Decision No. 546 at 1 (1990). This office has also concluded the protection afforded by section 159.002 extends only to records created by either a physician or someone under the supervision of a physician. *See Open Records Decision Nos.* 487 at 3-4 (1988), 370 at 2 (1983), 343 at 1 (1982). Section 159.001 of the

MPA defines "patient" as a person who consults with or is seen by a physician to receive medical care. Occ. Code § 159.001(3). Under this definition, a deceased person cannot be a patient under section 159.002 of the MPA. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 487 (1987), 370 (1983), 343 (1982). Thus, the MPA is applicable only to records related to a person who was alive at the time of diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment to which the records pertain. Upon review, we find a portion of the submitted information constitutes medical records. Accordingly, the district attorney's office must withhold this information, which we have marked, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the MPA. However, we find the district attorney's office has not established any of the remaining information consists of records of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by a physician that are created or maintained by a physician. Thus, the remaining information is not confidential under the MPA, and the district attorney's office may not withhold it under section 552.101 on that ground.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses chapter 411 of the Government Code, which pertains to criminal history record information ("CHRI") generated by the National Crime Information Center ("NCIC") or by the Texas Crime Information Center ("TCIC"). Title 28, part 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations governs the release of CHRI that states obtain from the federal government or other states. Open Records Decision No. 565 (1990). The federal regulations allow each state to follow its individual law with respect to CHRI it generates. *Id.* Section 411.083 of the Government Code makes CHRI DPS maintains confidential, except DPS may disseminate this information as provided in subchapters E-1 and F of chapter 411 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 411.083(a). Sections 411.083(b)(1) and 411.089(a) authorize a criminal justice agency to obtain CHRI, but a criminal justice agency may not release CHRI except to another criminal justice agency for a criminal justice purpose. *Id.* § 411.089(b)(1). Other entities specified in chapter 411 of the Government Code are entitled to obtain CHRI from DPS or another criminal justice agency; however, those entities may not release CHRI except as provided by chapter 411. *See generally id.* §§ 411.090-.127. Thus, any CHRI generated by the federal government or another state may not be made available to the requestor except in accordance with federal regulations. *See* ORD 565. We note, because the laws governing the dissemination of information obtained from the NCIC or TCIC are based on both law enforcement and privacy interests, the CHRI of a deceased individual that is obtained from the DPS or another criminal justice agency may be disseminated only as permitted by subchapters E-1 and F of chapter 411 of the Government Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 565 at 10-12 (1990). However, driving record information is not made confidential by the confidentiality provisions that govern CHRI. *See* Gov't Code § 411.082(2)(B) (definition of CHRI does not include driving record information). In addition, section 411.083 does not apply to active warrant information or other information relating to one's current involvement with the criminal justice system. *See id.* § 411.081(b) (police department allowed to disclose information pertaining to person's current involvement in the criminal justice system). Upon review, we find some of the information at issue, which we have marked, is confidential under section 411.083. Therefore, the district attorney's office must

withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code. However, the remaining information does not contain CHRI for purposes of chapter 411. Accordingly, the remaining information is not confidential under chapter 411, and the district attorney's office may not withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that ground.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 773.091 of the Health and Safety Code, which provides in part the following:

(b) Records of the identity, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by emergency medical services personnel or by a physician providing medical supervision that are created by the emergency medical services personnel or physician or maintained by an emergency medical services provider are confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.

...

(g) The privilege of confidentiality under this section does not extend to information regarding the presence, nature of injury or illness, age, sex, occupation, and city of residence of a patient who is receiving emergency medical services.

Health & Safety Code § 773.091(b), (g). The remaining information contains records made and maintained by emergency medical services personnel. Thus, section 773.091 is applicable to this information, which we have marked. Therefore, with the exception of the information subject to section 773.091(g) of the Health and Safety Code, which is not confidential under section 773.091, the district attorney's office must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 773.091(b) of the Health and Safety 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 the following types of information are excepted from required public disclosure under common-law privacy: some kinds of medical information, *see* Open Records Decision No. 455 (1987); and personal financial information not relating to the financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body, *see* Open Records Decision Nos. 600 (1992), 545 (1990). Under the common-law right of privacy, an individual has a right to be free from the publicizing of private affairs in which

the public has no legitimate concern. *Indus. Found.*, 540 S.W.2d at 682. In considering whether a public citizen's date of birth is private, the Third Court of Appeals looked to the supreme court's rationale in *Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts v. Attorney General of Texas*, 354 S.W.3d 336 (Tex. 2010). *Paxton v. City of Dallas*, No. 03-13-00546-CV, 2015 WL 3394061, at \*3 (Tex. App.—Austin May 22, 2015, pet. denied) (mem. op.). The supreme court concluded public employees' dates of birth are private under section 552.102 of the Government Code because the employees' privacy interest substantially outweighed the negligible public interest in disclosure.<sup>3</sup> *Tex. Comptroller*, 354 S.W.3d at 347-48. Based on *Texas Comptroller*, the court of appeals concluded the privacy rights of public employees apply equally to public citizens, and thus, public citizens' dates of birth are also protected by common-law privacy pursuant to section 552.101. *City of Dallas*, 2015 WL 3394061, at \*3. Nevertheless, because "the right of privacy is purely personal[.]" that right "terminates upon the death of the person whose privacy is invaded[.]" *Moore v. Charles B. Pierce Film Enters., Inc.*, 589 S.W.2d 489, 491 (Tex. Civ. App.—Texarkana 1979, writ ref'd n.r.e.); see also *Justice v. Belo Broadcasting Corp.*, 472 F. Supp. 145, 147 (N.D. Tex. 1979) ("action for invasion of privacy can be maintained only by a living individual whose privacy is invaded" (quoting Restatement (Second) of Torts § 6521 (1977))); Attorney General Opinions JM-229 (1984) ("the right of privacy lapses upon death"), H-917 (1976) ("We are . . . of the opinion that the Texas courts would follow the almost uniform rule of other jurisdictions that the right of privacy lapses upon death."); Open Records Decision No. 272 (1981) ("the right of privacy is personal and lapses upon death"). Thus, the district attorney's office must withhold the dates of birth of living individuals in the remaining information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. We also find some of the remaining information, which we have marked, satisfies the standard articulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation*. Accordingly, the district attorney's office must also withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, we conclude the remaining information is not confidential under common-law privacy, and the district attorney's office may not withhold it under section 552.101 on that ground.

Section 552.1175 of the Government Code may be applicable to some of the remaining information. Section 552.1175 protects the home address, home telephone number, emergency contact information, date of birth, social security number, and family member information of certain individuals, when that information is held by a governmental body in a non-employment capacity and the individual elects to keep the information confidential. See Gov't Code § 552.1175. Section 552.1175 applies, in part, to "peace officers as defined by Article 2.12, Code of Criminal Procedure" and "employees of a district attorney, criminal district attorney, or county or municipal attorney whose jurisdiction includes any criminal law or child protective services matters[.]" *Id.* § 552.1175(a)(1), (5). We also note

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<sup>3</sup>Section 552.102(a) excepts from disclosure "information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy." Gov't Code § 552.102(a).

section 552.1175 is also applicable to personal cellular telephone numbers, provided the cellular telephone service is not paid by a governmental body. *See See* Open Records Decision No. 506 at 5-6 (1988) (section 552.117 not applicable to cellular telephone numbers paid for by governmental body and intended for official use). Some of the remaining information pertains to individuals who may be subject to section 552.1175. Thus, the district attorney's office must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.1175 if it pertains to individuals who are subject to section 552.1175(a) and the individuals elect to restrict access to their information in accordance with section 552.1175(b); however, the district attorney's office may only withhold the cellular telephone numbers we marked if the cellular telephone services were not provided to the individuals at issue at public expense. If the individuals are not subject to section 552.1175(a) or they do not elect to restrict access to this information in accordance with section 552.1175(b), then the district attorney's office may not withhold this information under section 552.1175.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the district attorney's office may not withhold the cellular telephone numbers marked under section 552.1175 if the cellular telephone services were provided to the individuals at issue at public expense.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code provides information relating to a motor vehicle operator's license, driver's license, motor vehicle title or registration, or personal identification document issued by an agency of this state or another state or country is excepted from public release. *See* Gov't Code § 552.130. However, section 552.130 is designed to protect the privacy of individuals, and the right to privacy expires at death. *See Moore*, 589 S.W.2d at 491; ORD 272 at 1. The district attorney's office must withhold the visible license plates in the submitted photographs and video recordings, as well as the motor vehicle record information we have marked, under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

We note some of the materials at issue may be protected by copyright. A custodian of public records must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are copyrighted. Open Records Decision No. 180 at 3 (1977). A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.*; *see* Open Records Decision No. 109 (1975). If a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit.

To conclude, the district attorney's office must withhold the following: (1) the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the MPA and section 411.083 of the Government Code; (2) with the exception of the information subject to section 773.091(g) of the Health and Safety Code, which the district

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<sup>4</sup>Regardless of the applicability of section 552.1175, 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 under the Act. Gov't Code § 552.147(b).

attorney's office must release, the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 773.091(b) of the Health and Safety Code; (3) the dates of birth of living individuals and the information we have marked in the remaining documents under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy; (4) the information we have marked under section 552.1175 of the Government Code if it pertains to individuals who are subject to section 552.1175(a) of the Government Code, the individuals elect to restrict access to their information in accordance with section 552.1175(b) of the Government Code, and, for the cellular telephone numbers at issue, the cellular telephone services were not provided to the individuals at issue at public expense; and (5) the visible license plates in the submitted photographs and video recordings, as well as the motor vehicle record information we have marked, under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The district attorney's office must release the remaining information, but may only release any copyrighted information in accordance with copyright law.

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](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,



James L. Coggeshall  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JLC/bw

Ref: ID# 637703

Enc. Submitted documents

c: 2 Requestors  
(w/o enclosures)