



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 15, 2017

Mr. William Ryan
Lieutenant
Record Division
Pharr Police Department
1900 South Cage
Pharr, Texas 78577

OR2017-10319

Dear Mr. Ryan:

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# 657643 (ORR# 2017-152).

The Pharr Police Department (the "department") received a request for case number 13-6730. The department states it has released some of the requested information. The department claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exception the department claims and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the submitted information contains fingerprints, the public availability of which is governed by sections 560.001, 560.002, and 560.003 of the Government Code. Section 560.003 of the Government Code provides, "[a] biometric identifier in the possession of a governmental body is exempt from disclosure under [the Act]." Gov't Code § 560.003; *see id.* § 560.001(1) ("biometric identifier" means retina or iris scan, fingerprint, voiceprint, or record of hand or face geometry). Section 560.002 of the Government Code provides, however, "[a] governmental body that possesses a biometric identifier of an individual . . . may not sell, lease, or otherwise disclose the biometric identifier to another

¹Although you do not cite to section 552.108 of the Government Code in your brief, we understand you to raise this exception based on the substance of your argument.

person unless . . . the individual consents to the disclosure[.]” *Id.* § 560.002(1)(A). In this instance, the requestor is an attorney who represents the individual whose fingerprints are at issue. Thus, the requestor has a right of access to her client’s fingerprints under section 560.002(1)(A). The general exceptions found in the Act, such as section 552.108 of the Government Code, cannot impinge on a statutory right of access to information. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 613 at 4 (1993), 451 at 4 (1986). Therefore, the department must release the requestor’s client’s fingerprints pursuant to section 560.002 of the Government Code.

Section 552.108(a)(1) 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 . . . 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 requested information 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 (Tex. 1977). The department states the submitted report pertains to an active criminal investigation being conducted by the department. Upon review, however, we note the submitted information relates to felony possession of a controlled substance that occurred in 2013. The statute of limitations for such an offense is three years from the date of the offense. *See* Crim. Proc. Code art. 12.01(7) (felony indictment for all other felonies may be presented within three years from date of commission of the offense, and not afterward); Health & Safety Code § 481.134(e) (possession of controlled substance in penalty group 3 is state jail felony if offense occurred on real property that is owned, rented, or leased to a school). More than three years have elapsed since the events giving rise to the investigation in the submitted information, and the department does not inform this office any criminal charges were filed within the limitations period. Further, the department has not otherwise demonstrated release of the information at issue would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. Therefore, we find the department has not demonstrated the applicability of section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code to the submitted information, and the department may not withhold the information on that basis.

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. This section encompasses information protected by chapter 411 of the Government Code, which makes confidential criminal history record information (“CHRI”) generated by the National Crime Information Center or by the Texas Crime Information Center. *See id.* § 411.083(a). 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 laws with respect to the CHRI it generates. *See id.* Section 411.083 of the Government Code deems confidential CHRI that the Department of Public Safety (“DPS”) maintains, except that DPS may disseminate this information as

provided in chapter 411, subchapter F, or subchapter E-1 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; however, 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 obtained from DPS or any other criminal justice agency must be withheld under section 552.101 in conjunction with chapter 411, subchapter F, of the Government Code. Upon review, we find the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") number we have marked consists of CHRI that is confidential under section 411.083. Thus, the department must withhold the marked FBI number under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code and federal law.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). 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. *Id.* at 682. The Third Court of Appeals has concluded public citizens' dates of birth are protected by common-law privacy pursuant to section 552.101. *See 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.). Thus, with the exception of the requestor's client's date of birth, to which the requestor has a right of access pursuant to section 552.023 of the Government Code, the department must withhold all public citizens' dates of birth under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(a) ("person's authorized representative has special right of access, beyond right of general public, to information held by governmental body that relates to person and that is protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect that person's privacy interests"); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individual requests information concerning herself).

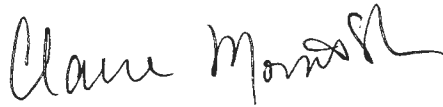
In summary, the department must release the requestor's client's fingerprints pursuant to section 560.002 of the Government Code. The department must withhold the marked FBI number under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code and federal law and, with the exception of the requestor's client's date of birth, the department must withhold all public citizens' dates of birth under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The department must release the remaining information to this requestor.²

²We note the requestor has a right of access to some of the information being released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(a); ORD 481 at 4. Thus, if the department receives another request for the same information from a different requestor, the department must again seek a decision from this office.

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# 657643

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)