



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 23, 2017

Mr. Les Moore
Police Legal Adviser
Irving Police Department
P.O. Box 152288
Irving, Texas 75015

OR2017-19212

Dear Mr. Moore:

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# 672520.

The Irving Police Department (the "department") received a request for all audio and video recordings related to the death of a named inmate. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.1085 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions 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. This section encompasses the doctrine of constitutional privacy. Constitutional privacy consists of two interrelated types of privacy: (1) the right to make certain kinds of decisions independently and (2) an individual's interest in avoiding disclosure of personal matters. Open Records Decision No. 455 at 4 (1987). The first type protects an individual's autonomy within "zones of privacy" which include matters related to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relationships, and child rearing and education. *Id.* The second type of constitutional privacy requires a balancing between the individual's privacy interests and the public's need to know information of public concern. *Id.* The scope of information protected is narrower than that under the common law doctrine of privacy; the information must concern the "most intimate aspects of human affairs." *Id.* at 5 (quoting *Ramie v. City of Hedwig Village, Texas*, 765 F.2d 490, 492 (5th Cir. 1985)). However,

because privacy is a personal right that lapses at death, the constitutional right to privacy does not encompass information that relates only to a deceased individual. *See 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* Open Records Decision No. 272 at 1 (1981) (privacy rights lapse upon death). Nevertheless, the United States Supreme Court has determined that surviving family members can have a privacy interest in information relating to their deceased relatives. *See Nat'l Archives & Records Admin. v. Favish*, 541 U.S. 157 (2004). We understand the decedent's family objects to disclosure of the information at issue. Upon review, we find the family's privacy interest in the information we have indicated outweighs the public's interest in the disclosure of this information. Therefore, the department must withhold the information we have indicated under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with constitutional privacy and the holding in *Favish*.¹ However, we find the remaining information at issue either does not fall within the zones of privacy or implicate an individual's privacy interests for purposes of constitutional privacy, or the public interest in the information at issue outweighs any remaining privacy interests. Thus, the department may not withhold the remaining portions of the submitted video recordings under section 552.101 in conjunction with constitutional privacy and the holding in *Favish*.

Section 552.1085 of the Government Code provides, in pertinent part, the following:

(c) A sensitive crime scene image in the custody of a governmental body is confidential and excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021 and a governmental body may not permit a person to view or copy the image except as provided by this section. This section applies to any sensitive crime scene image regardless of the date that the image was taken or recorded.

Gov't Code § 552.1085(c). For purposes of section 552.1085 of the Government Code, "sensitive crime scene image" means "a photograph or video recording taken at a crime scene, contained in or part of a closed criminal case, that depicts a deceased person in a state of dismemberment, decapitation, or similar mutilation or that depicts the deceased person's genitalia." *See id.* § 552.1085(a)(6). Upon review, we find the remaining portions of the submitted video recordings do not consist of sensitive crime scene images for the purposes of section 552.1085. Accordingly, the department may not withhold this information under section 552.1085(c).

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

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure of this information.

excepted from public release.² *See id.* § 552.130. Accordingly, the department must withhold all discernible images of license plates under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, the department must withhold the information we have indicated under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with constitutional privacy and the holding in *Favish*. The department must withhold all discernible images of license plates under section 552.130 of the Government Code. 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,



Cole Hutchison
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CH/bw

Ref: ID# 672520

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

²The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).