



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 1, 2017

Mr. William T. Little  
Assistant County & District Attorney  
County of Ellis  
109 South Jackson  
Waxahachie, Texas 75165

OR2017-20017

Dear Mr. Little:

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# 674043.

The Ellis County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

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 encompasses the Driver's Privacy Protection Act of 1994 (the "DPPA"), section 2721 of title 18 of the United States Code. Section 2721 provides, in part, the following:

(a) In general.—A State department of motor vehicles, and any officer, employee, or contractor thereof, shall not knowingly disclose or otherwise make available to any person or entity:

(1) personal information, as defined in 18 U.S.C. 2725(3), about any individual obtained by the department in connection with a motor vehicle record, except as provided in subsection (b) of this section; or

(2) highly restricted personal information, as defined in 18 U.S.C. 2725(4), about any individual obtained by the department in connection with a motor vehicle record, without the express consent of the person to whom such information applies, except uses permitted in subsections (b)(1), (b)(4), (b)(6), and (b)(9)[.]

(b) Permissible uses.—Personal information referred to in subsection (a) . . . and, subject to subsection (a)(2), may be disclosed as follows:

(1) For use by any government agency . . . in carrying out its functions.

...

(c) Resale or redisclosure.—An authorized recipient of personal information (except a recipient under subsection (b)(11) or (12)) may resell or redisclose the information only for a use permitted under subsection (b) (but not for uses under subsection (b)(11) or (12)). . . . Any authorized recipient (except a recipient under subsection (b)(11)) that resells or rediscloses personal information covered by this chapter must keep for a period of 5 years records identifying each person or entity that receives information and the permitted purpose for which the information will be used and must make such records available to the motor vehicle department upon request.

18 U.S.C. § 2721(a), (b)(1), (c). Section 2721(a) is applicable to state departments of motor vehicles. *See id.* § 2721(a). Pursuant to section 2721(b), personal information may be disclosed to certain entities by a state department of motor vehicles. *See id.* § 2721(b). However, we find the sheriff's office is not a state department of motor vehicles. Further, the sheriff's office does not assert it received the information at issue from a state department of motor vehicles. Therefore, the sheriff's office has failed to demonstrate any of the responsive information is subject to section 2721(a) of the DPPA. Accordingly, the sheriff's office may not withhold any of the responsive information under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 730.004 of the Transportation Code, which provides, “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, including chapter 552, Government Code, except as provided by sections 730.005-730.007, an agency may not disclose personal information about any person obtained by the agency in connection with a motor vehicle record.” Transp. Code § 730.004. Section 730.004 applies only to an “agency” that compiles or maintains motor vehicle records. *See id.* § 730.003(1). Upon review, we find you have not established the sheriff's office compiles or maintains motor vehicle records; therefore, section 730.004 does not apply

to the sheriff's office and the sheriff's office may not withhold any of the responsive information under section 552.101 on that basis.

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. Additionally, this office has concluded some kinds of medical information are generally highly intimate or embarrassing. See Open Records Decision No. 455 (1987). The 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.). We note, however, that one of the dates of birth belongs to a deceased individual. Because privacy is a personal right that lapses at death, the common-law right to privacy does not encompass information that relates only to a deceased individual. Accordingly, the date of birth of the deceased individual may not be withheld on common-law privacy grounds. 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).

Upon review, we find some of the submitted information satisfies the standard articulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation*. Accordingly, except for the date of birth belonging to the deceased individual, the sheriff's office must withhold the information you marked, and the additional information we marked, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

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(a). We note the purpose of section 552.130 is to protect the privacy interests of individuals. Because the right of privacy lapses at death, motor vehicle record information that pertains solely to deceased individuals may not be withheld under section 552.130. See *Moore*, 589 S.W.2d at 491; ORD 272 at 1. Accordingly, with the exception of the information relating solely to a deceased individual, the sheriff's office must withhold the motor vehicle record information you marked, and the additional information we marked, under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, except for the date of birth belonging to the deceased individual, the sheriff's office must withhold the information you marked and we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. With the exception of the information relating solely to a deceased individual, the sheriff's office must withhold the

information you marked and we marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.

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,



Britni Ramirez  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

BR/som

Ref: ID# 674043

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)