



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 11, 2017

Mr. Thomas M. Gilliland
Public Information Officer
Harris County Sheriff's Office
1200 Baker Street, 2nd Floor
Houston, Texas 77002-1206

OR2017-20626

Dear Mr. Gilliland:

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# 674710 (PIR No. 17SO500984).

The Harris County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for a specified report. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception 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 information made confidential by other statutes, such as section 261.201(a) of the Family Code, which provides, in relevant part:

(a) [T]he following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, 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.

...

(h) This section does not apply to an investigation of child abuse or neglect in a home or facility regulated under Chapter 42, Human Resources Code.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a), (h). You argue the submitted information was used or developed in an investigation of alleged child abuse or neglect conducted by the department under chapter 261 of the Family Code. However, section 261.201 does not apply to an investigation of child abuse or neglect that occurred in a home or facility regulated under chapter 42 of the Human Resources Code. *Id.* § 261.201(h). We note the incident at issue allegedly occurred while the child at issue was under the care of a facility regulated by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services under chapter 42 of the Human Resources Code. Thus, section 261.201 is not applicable to the investigation at issue, and the sheriff's office may not withhold the submitted 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. This office has found common-law privacy generally protects the identifying information of a victim of alleged child abuse or neglect. *See* Open Records Decision No. 394 (1983); *cf.* Fam. Code § 261.201. We find portions of the submitted information, which we marked, satisfy the standard articulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation*. Accordingly, the sheriff's office must withhold the information we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. As the sheriff's office raises no further arguments against disclosure, 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, 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Britni Ramirez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "R" at the end.

Britni Ramirez
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BR/som

Ref: ID# 674710

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)