



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 17, 2017

Ms. Amelia Young
L.E. Specialist-Records
Burnet County Sheriff's Office
P.O. Box 1249
Burnet, Texas 78611

OR2017-23802

Dear Ms. Young:

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# 680237 (ORR No. 4205).

The Burnet County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request from an investigator with the Texas Education Agency ("TEA") for information pertaining to a named individual regarding a specified offense. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 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. Section 552.101 encompasses section 261.201 of the Family Code. Section 261.201(a) provides as follows:

(a) [T]he following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under [the Act] 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.

Family Code § 261.201(a). Upon review, we find the submitted information pertains to an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse. Accordingly, this information falls within the scope of section 261.201 of the Family Code. *See id.* §§ 101.003(a) (defining “child” for purposes of section 261.201 as person under 18 years of age who is not and has not been married or who has not had the disabilities of minority removed for general purposes), 261.001(1) (defining “abuse” for purposes of chapter 261 of the Family Code). You do not indicate the sheriff’s office has adopted a rule that governs the release of this type of information. Thus, we assume no such regulation exists. Given that assumption, we conclude the submitted information is generally confidential under section 261.201 of the Family Code. However, section 261.201(a) provides information encompassed by subsection (a) may be disclosed “for purposes consistent with [the Family Code] and applicable federal or state law.” *Id.* § 261.201(a).

As noted above, the requestor is an investigator with the TEA, which has assumed the duties of the State Board for Educator Certification (“SBEC”).¹ In this instance, section 22.082 of the Education Code constitutes applicable state law. Section 22.082 provides the TEA “may obtain from any law enforcement or criminal justice agency all criminal history record information [“CHRI”] and all records contained in any closed criminal investigation file that relate to a specific applicant for or holder of a certificate issued under Subchapter B, Chapter 21 [of the Education Code].” Educ. Code § 22.082. CHRI consists of “information collected about a person by a criminal justice agency that consists of identifiable descriptions and notations of arrests, detentions, indictments, informations, and other formal criminal charges and their dispositions.” Gov’t Code §§ 411.082(2); *see also id.* §§ 411.0901 (TEA is entitled to obtain CHRI from Texas Department of Public Safety (“DPS”) relating to certain employees of schools), .090 (SBEC is entitled to obtain CHRI from DPS about person who has applied to SBEC for certificate under subchapter B, chapter 21, Education Code), .087(a)(2) (agency entitled to obtain CHRI from DPS also authorized to “obtain from any other criminal justice agency in this state criminal history record information maintained by that [agency]”); *cf. Brookshire v. Houston Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 508 S.W.2d 675, 678-79 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1974, no writ) (when legislature defines term in one statute and uses same term in relation to same subject matter in later statute, later use of term is same as previously defined).

The requestor states the TEA is conducting an investigation of the named individual who either has applied for or currently holds educator credentials. The requestor seeks access to

¹The 79th Texas legislature passed House Bill 1116, which required the transfer of SBEC’s administrative functions and services to the TEA, effective September 1, 2005.

information relating to a specific case involving the named individual.² You inform us the submitted information relates to a pending case. Accordingly, the requestor may have a right of access under section 22.082 of the Education Code to CHRI regarding the named individual. Although you also seek to withhold such information under section 552.108 of the Government Code and section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy, a specific statutory right of access overcomes common-law and general exceptions to disclosure in the Act. *See CenterPoint Energy Houston Elec. LLC v. Harris County Rd. Auth.*, 436 F.3d 541, 544 (5th Cir. 2006) (common-law controls only where there is no conflicting or controlling statutory law); Attorney General Opinion DM-146 at 3 (1992); Open Records Decision Nos. 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exceptions to disclosure under the Act). Consequently, if the sheriff's office determines release of the CHRI is consistent with the Family Code, the sheriff's office must release information from the submitted documents to this requestor that shows the type of allegations made and whether there was an arrest, information, indictment, detention, conviction, or other formal charges and their dispositions.³ In that instance, the remainder of the submitted information is confidential under section 261.201 of the Family Code and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code. If, however, the sheriff's office determines release is not consistent with the Family Code, then the submitted information must be withheld in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.⁴ *See* Attorney General Opinions DM-353 at 4 n.6 (1995) (finding interagency transfer of information prohibited where confidentiality statute enumerates specific entities to which release of information is authorized and where potential receiving governmental body is not among statute's enumerated entities), JM-590 at 4-5 (1986); Fam. Code §261.201(b)-(g), (k) (listing entities authorized to receive Fam. Code § 261.201 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/>

²The requestor also claims a right to the information at issue under sections 261.308 and 261.406 of the Family Code. However, these statutes apply to information held by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and not the sheriff's office. *See* Fam. Code §§ 261.308, .406.

³As noted, the requestor has a special right of access, beyond that of the general public, to any information being released in this instance. Therefore, if the sheriff's office receives another request for this information from a different requestor, it must again seek a ruling from this office.

⁴As our ruling is dispositive in this instance, we do not address your arguments against disclosure.

[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 'B' and 'R'.

Britni Ramirez
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BR/gw

Ref: ID# 680237

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)