



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 14, 2017

Mr. Oscar G. Gabaldón, Jr.
Assistant City Attorney
Office of the City Attorney
City of El Paso
P.O. Box 1890
El Paso, Texas 79950-1890

OR2017-26002

Dear Mr. Gabaldón:

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# 684608 (City's Case No. 17-1026-8814).

The El Paso Police Department (the "department") received a request for a specified police 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. Section 552.101 of the Government Code encompasses section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides, in 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.

...

(k) Notwithstanding Subsection (a), an investigating agency, other than the [Texas Department of Family and Protective Services] or the Texas Juvenile Justice Department, on request, shall provide to the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of a child who is the subject of reported abuse or neglect, or to the child if the child is at least 18 years of age, information concerning the reported abuse or neglect that would otherwise be confidential under this section. The investigating agency shall withhold information under this subsection if the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of the child requesting the information is alleged to have committed the abuse or neglect.

(l) Before a child or a parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of a child may inspect or copy a record or file concerning the child under Subsection (k), the custodian of the record or file must redact:

...

[(2) any information that is excepted from required disclosure under [the Act], or other law[.]

Fam. Code § 261.201(a), (k), (l)(2). The submitted information consists of a report of alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect made to the department. *See id.* §§ 101.003(a) (defining “child” for purposes of this section 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), (4) (defining “abuse” and “neglect” for purposes of chapter 261 of the Family Code). Accordingly, we find this information is subject to section 261.201 of the Family Code. Although the requestor is a parent of the child victim listed in the report, the child victim is now 18 years of age. Thus, the requestor no longer has a right of access to her adult child’s records as a parent under section 261.201(k). *Id.* § 261.201(k). However, we note the requestor may be acting as the authorized representative of her adult child. If the requestor is not acting as the authorized representative of her adult child, then the submitted information must be withheld in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a) of the Family Code. If, however, the requestor is acting as the authorized representative of her adult child, the department may not use section 261.201(a) to withhold this information from the requestor. *See id.* However, section 261.201(l)(2) states any information excepted from required disclosure under the Act or other law must be withheld from disclosure. *See id.* § 261.201(l)(2). Accordingly, in the

instance the requestor is acting as the authorized representative of her adult child, we will address your arguments under section 552.101 for the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrines of common-law and constitutional privacy. Common-law privacy 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, in this instance, the requestor is acting as her adult child's legal representative. The requestor has a right of access to her own private information and her adult child's private information under section 552.023 of the Government Code. See Gov't Code § 552.023(a) ("person's legal 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 himself). Upon review, we find the information we have marked satisfies the standard articulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation*. Accordingly, the department must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, the department may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law 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 (citing *Ramie v. City of Hedwig Village, Texas*, 765 F.2d 490 (5th Cir. 1985)). Upon review, we find the department has failed to demonstrate any portion of the information at issue falls within the zones of privacy or implicates an individual's privacy interests for purposes of

constitutional privacy. Therefore, the department may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 on the basis of constitutional privacy.

In summary, if the requestor is not the authorized representative of her adult child, then the submitted information must be withheld in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a) of the Family Code. If, however, the requestor is the authorized representative of her adult child, the department must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy and release the remaining information.¹

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,



Kelly McWethy
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KSM/som

Ref: ID# 684608

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

¹We note the requestor has a special right of access to the information being released. See Fam. Code § 261.201(k), *see also* Gov't Code § 552.023; Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987). Accordingly, if the department receives another request for this same information from a different requestor, the department must again seek a ruling from this office.