



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 6, 2017

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

OR2017-27642

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# 687289.

The Ellis County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for all information pertaining to a named individual. The sheriff's office claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.117, 552.130, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions the sheriff's office claims and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses 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. This office has found a compilation of an individual's criminal history is highly embarrassing information, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person. *Cf. United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (when considering prong regarding individual's privacy interest, court recognized distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of information and noted that individual has significant privacy interest in compilation of one's criminal history).

Furthermore, we find a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public.

The present request seeks all reports pertaining to a named individual. This request requires the sheriff's office to compile the named individual's criminal history and implicates the named individual's right to privacy. Therefore, to the extent the sheriff's office maintains law enforcement records listing the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the sheriff's office must generally withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

We note the requestor is representative of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services ("DFPS"). Section 411.114(a) of the Government Code states, in pertinent part,

(2) The [DFPS] shall obtain from the [Department of Public Safety ("DPS")] criminal history record information ["CHRI"] maintained by the [DPS] that relates to a person who is:

...

(I) an alleged perpetrator in a report the [DFPS] receives alleging that the person has abused, neglected, or exploited a child, an elderly person, or a person with a disability, provided that:

(i) the report alleges the person has engaged in conduct that meets the applicable definition of abuse, neglect, or exploitation under Chapter 261, Family Code, or Chapter 48, Human Resources Code; and

(ii) the person is not also the victim of the alleged conduct[.]

...

(4) Subject to Section 411.087, the [DFPS] is entitled to:

...

(B) obtain from any other criminal justice agency in this state [CHRI] maintained by that criminal justice agency that relates to a person described by Subdivision (2) or (3)[.]

Gov't Code § 411.114(a)(2)(I), (4)(B). 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." *Id.* § 411.082(2). Thus, the requested information may contain CHRI, and this

requestor has a right of access under section 411.114 to CHRI in information held by the department if it involves an alleged perpetrator in a report of child abuse or neglect.

In this instance, the requestor does not state the named individual is an alleged perpetrator in a report of abuse or neglect of a child, but only requests information about the named individual. Therefore, if the named individual is an alleged perpetrator in a report of abuse or neglect of a child that was reported to DFPS, the department must release the type of allegation made and whether there was an arrest, information, indictment, detention, conviction, or other formal charges and their dispositions from any responsive information, to the extent it exists, depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant. *See Collins v. Tex Mall, L.P.*, 297 S.W.3d 409, 415 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth. 2009, no pet.) (statutory provision controls and preempts common law only when statute directly conflicts with common-law principle); *CenterPoint Energy Houston Elec. LLC v. Harris County Toll Rd. Auth.*, 436 F.3d 541, 544 (5th Cir. 2006) (common law controls only where there is no conflicting or controlling statutory law). In that event, to the extent it exists, the department must withhold any remaining information depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, if the named individual is not an alleged perpetrator in a report of abuse or neglect of a child that was reported to DFPS, then, to the extent the department maintains law enforcement records depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the department must withhold any such information in its entirety under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/som

Ref: ID# 687289

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)