



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 4, 2019

Ms. Katie Leininger
Assistant City Attorney
City of Pearland
3519 Liberty Drive
Pearland, Texas 77581

OR2019-03155

Dear Mr. Leininger:

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# 749098.

The City of Pearland (the "city") received a request for a specified lien balance. You claim some of 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 representative sample of information.¹

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 182.052 of the Utilities Code, which provides in relevant part, the following:

- (a) Except as provided by Section 182.054, a government-operated utility may not disclose personal information in a customer's account record, or any

¹We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. See Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

information relating to the volume or units of utility usage or the amounts billed to or collected from the individual for utility usage, if the customer requests that the government-operated utility keep the information confidential. However, a government-operated utility may disclose information related to the customer's volume or units of utility usage or amounts billed to or collected from the individual for utility usage if the primary source of water for such utility was a sole-source designated aquifer.

(b) A customer may request confidentiality by delivering to the government-operated utility an appropriately marked form provided under Subsection (c)(3) or any other written request for confidentiality.

Util. Code § 182.052(a)-(b). Water service is included in the scope of utility services covered by section 182.052. *Id.* § 182.051(3). "Personal information" under section 182.052(a) includes an individual's address, telephone number and social security number, but does not include the individual's name. *See id.* § 182.051(4); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 625 (1994) (construing statutory predecessor). A customer's request for confidentiality must precede the utility's receipt of the request for information. ORD 625 at 6. Additionally, because section 182.052 is intended to protect the safety and privacy of individual customers, this statute is applicable to only information pertaining to natural persons; and does not protect information relating to business, governmental, and other artificial entities. *See id.* at 4-5 (in context of section 182.051(4) of the Utilities Code, "individual" means only natural persons and does not include artificial entities).

The city asserts the information it marked consists of personal information of a utility customer. You state the customer at issue has elected confidentiality for the account responsive to this request. You inform us the primary source of water for the city's utility services is not a sole-source designated aquifer. There is also no indication the exceptions listed in section 182.054 apply. Accordingly, the city must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 182.052(a) of the Utilities Code. However, the remaining information is not confidential under section 182.052(a), and the city may not withhold it under section 552.101 on that ground. The city must release the remaining 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/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, appearing to read "Erin Groff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Erin Groff
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

EMG/eb

Ref: ID# 749098

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)