



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 14, 2019

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

OR2019-04343

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# 750547 (HSCO File Number #18SO9001918).

The Harris County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information pertaining to two named individuals or addresses during a specified period of time. You state you do not have information responsive to a portion of the request.¹ You state you have released some information. You claim the requested 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 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

¹The Act does not require a governmental body to release information that did not exist when a request for information was received or to prepare new information in response to a request. *See Econ. Opportunities Dev. Corp. v. Bustamante*, 562 S.W.2d 266, 267-68 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1978, writ dismissed); Open Records Decision Nos. 605 at 2 (1992), 452 at 3 (1986), 362 at 2 (1983).

satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. 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. U.S. Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (finding significant privacy interest in compilation of individual's criminal history by recognizing distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations' and compiled summary of criminal history information). Furthermore, we find a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public.

The requestor asks for all information held by the sheriff's office concerning named individuals. Therefore, to the extent the sheriff's office maintains any unspecified law enforcement records depicting either named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the sheriff's office must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, the sheriff's office has submitted information that does not list either named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant. Thus, this information is not confidential under common-law privacy, and the sheriff's office may not withhold it under section 552.101 on that ground.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 58.008(b) of the Family Code, which provides as follows:

Except as provided by Subsection (d), law enforcement records concerning a child and information concerning a child that are stored by electronic means or otherwise and from which a record could be generated may not be disclosed to the public and shall be:

- (1) if maintained on paper or microfilm, kept separate from adult records;
- (2) if maintained electronically in the same computer system as adult records, accessible only under controls that are separate and distinct from the controls to access electronic data concerning adults; and
- (3) maintained on a local basis only and not sent to a central state or federal depository, except as provided by Subsection (c) or Subchapter B, D, or E.

Fam. Code § 58.008(b); *see also id.* §§ 51.03(a)-(b) (defining "delinquent conduct" and "conduct indicating a need for supervision" for purposes of title 3 of Family Code). Section 58.008(b) is applicable to records of juvenile conduct that occurred before, on, or after September 1, 2017. *See Act of May 28, 2017, 85th Leg., R.S., ch. 746, § 22, 2017 Tex. Sess. Law Serv. 3173, 3187.* The juvenile must have been at least ten years old and less than seventeen years of age when the conduct occurred. *See Fam. Code § 51.02(2)* (defining

“child” for purposes of title 3 of Family Code). We find Exhibit B3 involves a juvenile offender, so as to fall within the scope of section 58.008(b). The exceptions in section 58.008 do not appear to apply. Therefore, the sheriff’s office must withhold Exhibit B3 under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 58.008(b) of the Family Code.²

In summary, to the extent the sheriff’s office maintains any unspecified law enforcement records depicting either named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the sheriff’s office must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The sheriff’s office must withhold Exhibit B3 under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 58.008(b) of the Family Code.

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,



Erin Groff
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

EMG/eb

Ref: ID# 750547

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

²As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address the argument of the sheriff’s office to withhold this information.