



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 25, 2019

Mr. Adam Anderson
Assistant County Attorney
Montgomery County
501 North Thompson, Suite 300
Conroe, Texas 77301

OR2019-26777

Dear Mr. Anderson:

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# 787475 (ORR# 19PIA293).

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information pertaining to a specified address. The sheriff's office claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts "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(a) of the Family Code, which provides as follows:

(a) Except as provided by Section 261.203, the 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.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). Upon review, we find the submitted information was used or developed in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse under chapter 261. *See id.* § 261.001(1) (defining “abuse” for purposes of chapter 261 of the Family Code); *see also id.* § 101.003(a) (defining “child” for purposes of chapter 261). Thus, the submitted information is subject to section 261.201. The sheriff’s office states it has not adopted a rule that governs the release of this type of information. Accordingly, we conclude the submitted information is generally confidential under section 261.201(a) of the Family Code.

However, section 261.201 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). Subchapter E of chapter 264 of the Family Code concerns the establishment and duties of children’s advocacy centers. *See id.* §§ 264.401-.411. Section 264.405 of the Family Code directs children’s advocacy centers to provide services for victims of child abuse and their families. *Id.* § 264.405. Furthermore, section 264.408(c) of the Family Code provides “a law enforcement agency . . . may share with a [children’s advocacy] center information that is confidential under Section 261.201 as needed to provide services” under chapter 264 of the Family Code. *Id.* § 264.408(c).

The requestor is a representative of a children’s advocacy center. However, the requestor does not state whether the requested information is sought for the purposes of providing services under chapter 264 of the Family Code. Therefore, we must rule conditionally. A statutory right of access prevails over the Act’s general exceptions to public disclosure, including section 552.108 of the Government Code. *See 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 exception to disclosure under the Act).* Thus, if the sheriff’s office determines the submitted information is not needed to provide services under chapter 264, then it must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a) of the Family Code. However, if the sheriff’s office determines the information at issue is needed to provide services under chapter 264 of the Family Code, then the sheriff’s office generally has the discretion to release the information to this requestor pursuant to section 264.408(c). We note information shared with or provided to a children’s advocacy center under section 264.408(c) retains its confidentiality under section 261.201(a) of the Family Code. *See id.*

Section 552.130 of the Government Code provides information relating to a motor vehicle operator’s license, driver’s license, motor vehicle title or registration, or personal identification document issued by an agency of this state or another state or country is

excepted from public release.¹ *See* Gov't Code § 552.130. Thus, the motor vehicle record information we have marked is generally confidential under section 552.130 of the Government Code. Although a statutory right of access prevails over the Act's general exceptions to public disclosure. *See* 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 exception to disclosure under the Act). However, because section 552.130 has its own access provisions, section 552.130 is not a general exception under the Act. *See* Gov't Code § 552.130(b) (information described by section 552.130(a) may only be released in manner authorized by chapter 730 of Transportation Code). Accordingly, we must address the conflict between the confidentiality of section 552.130 of the Government Code and the requestor's potential right of access under section 264.408(c) of the Family Code.

Where information falls within both general and specific statutory provisions, the specific provision prevails over the general provision unless the general provision was enacted later and there is clear evidence that the legislature intended the general provision to prevail. *See* Gov't Code § 311.026(b); *Cuellar v. State*, 521 S.W.2d 277 (Tex. Crim. App. 1975 (under well-established rule of statutory construction, specific statutory provisions prevail over general ones). Section 552.130 of the Government Code specifically protects motor vehicle record information and contains its own release provisions. In contrast, section 264.408 allows designated types of entities to share with child advocacy centers information that is confidential under section 261.201 as needed to provide services under chapter 264 of the Family Code. *See* Fam. Code § 264.408(c). Thus, we find section 552.130 of the Government Code is a more specific statute than section 264.408 of the Family Code. Therefore, if the sheriff's office determines release of the submitted information is needed to provide services under chapter 264 of the Family Code, then it has the discretion to release the information at issue to this requestor pursuant to section 264.408(c), but must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.


In summary, if the sheriff's office determines the submitted information is not needed to provide services under chapter 264 of the Family Code, then it must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a) of the Family Code. If the sheriff's office determines the information is needed to provide services under chapter 264 of the Family Code, then the sheriff's office has the discretion to release the submitted information pursuant to section 264.408(c) of the Family Code, with the exception of the information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code, which the sheriff's office must withhold.

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.

¹ The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 at 2 (1987), 480 at 5 (1987).

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 <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/jxd

Ref: ID# 787475

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)