



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 29, 2020

Ms. Mary E. Miller  
Assistant District Attorney  
Denton County Sheriff's Office  
127 North Woodrow Lane, Suite 300  
Denton, Texas 76205

OR2020-02704

Dear Ms. Miller:

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# 808967 (ORR# S002736).

The Denton County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information related to a specified incident. The sheriff's office claims some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> We have considered the exceptions the sheriff's office claims 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. The sheriff's office raises section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege, which Texas courts have long recognized. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969). The informer's privilege protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority. *See Open Records Decision No. 208 at 1-2 (1978)*. The informer's privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar law-enforcement agencies, as well as those who report violations of statutes with civil or criminal penalties to "administrative officials having a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres." *Open Records Decision No. 279 at 1-2 (1981)* (citing 8 John H. Wigmore, *Evidence in Trials at Common Law*, § 2374, at 767 (J. McNaughton Rev. Ed.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the sheriff's office does not raise section 552.130 of the Government Code in its brief, we understand the sheriff's office to raise this exception based on its markings.

1961)). The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4 (1988). The privilege excepts the informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect that informer's identity. Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990). We note the informer's privilege does not apply where the informant's identity is known to the individual who is the subject of the complaint. *See* ORD 208 at 1-2.

The sheriff's office states portions of the submitted information identify a complainant who reported violations of law to the sheriff's office. Based upon the sheriff's office's representations and our review, we conclude the sheriff's office has demonstrated the applicability of the common-law informer's privilege to some of the information at issue, which we have marked. Therefore, the sheriff's office may withhold the information we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. However, we find the sheriff's office has not demonstrated the remaining information identifies an individual who reported a criminal violation to the sheriff's office for purposes of the informer's privilege. Accordingly, the sheriff's office may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 on that basis.

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. *See* Gov't Code § 552.130. Accordingly, the sheriff's office must withhold the motor vehicle record information it marked and we marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, the sheriff's office may withhold the information we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. The sheriff's office must withhold the motor vehicle record information it marked and we marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The sheriff's office must release the remaining information to this requestor.<sup>2</sup>

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 <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

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<sup>2</sup> We note the requestor has a right of access to some of the information being released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(a) (governmental body may not deny access to person to whom information relates or person's agent on ground that information is considered confidential by privacy principles); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individuals request information concerning themselves). Thus, if the sheriff's office receives another request for the same information from a different requestor, the sheriff's office must again seek a decision from this office.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Claire Morris Sloan", with a decorative flourish at the end.

Claire V. Morris Sloan  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

CVMS/be

Ref: ID# 808967

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)