



KEN PAXTON  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 31, 2020

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

OR2020-03091

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# 816209 (ORR# S002969).

The Denton County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You claim 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 information.

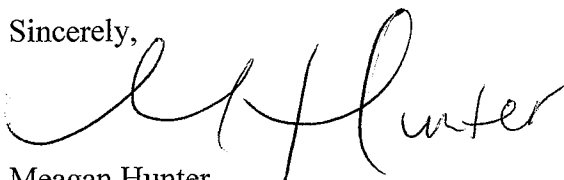
Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege, which Texas courts have 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. 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)*. However, witnesses who provide information in the course of an investigation but do not make a report of the violation are not informants for the purposes of claiming the informer's privilege. 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*.

You state the submitted information identifies a complainant who reported a possible violation of law to the sheriff's office. We have no indication the subject of the complaint knows the identity of the complainant. We note, in some circumstances, where an oral statement is captured on tape and the voice of the informant is recognizable, it may be necessary to withhold the entire audio statement to protect the informant's identity. Open Records Decision No. 434 at 2 (1986). Based upon your representations and our review, we conclude you have demonstrated the applicability of the common-law informer's privilege to some of the information at issue. Therefore, the sheriff's office may withhold the information we marked and the submitted audio recordings in their entireties under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. However, we find you have not demonstrated any of the remaining information at issue consists of the identifying information of an individual who made a report of 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. The sheriff's office 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 <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,



Meagan Hunter  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MH/gw

Ref: ID# 816209

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)