



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 7, 2020

Ms. Ana Schumacher  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of El Paso  
P.O. Box 1890  
El Paso, Texas 79950-1890

OR2020-03764

Dear Ms. Schumacher:

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# 816991 (ORR No. 20-1018-335).

The City of El Paso (the "city") received a request for information regarding a specified Animal Services case. 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, provided the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. *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, individuals 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).

You state the submitted information identifies a complainant who reported possible violations of section 7.04.080 of the city code to the city's Animal Services Department, which is responsible for enforcing the provisions at issue. You explain the alleged violation is punishable by fine. We have no indication the subject of the complaint knows the identity of the complainant. Based upon these representations and our review, we conclude the city has demonstrated the applicability of the common-law informer's privilege to some of the information at issue. Therefore, the city may withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. However, we find you have failed to demonstrate any of the remaining information consists of the identifying information of an individual who reported a criminal violation to the city for purposes of the informer's privilege. Accordingly, the city may not withhold the remaining information under section 552.101 on that basis. As it raises no further exceptions to disclosure, 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 <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,



Jesse Harvey  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JHI/mo

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Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)