



KEN PAXTON  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 28, 2020

Mr. Thomas L. McMillian  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Amarillo  
200 Southeast 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Amarillo, Texas 79101

OR2020-06445

Dear Mr. McMillian:

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# 821388 (Request No. 20-231).

The Amarillo Police Department (the "department") received a request for information related to a specified call for service. 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 department. 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 department may withhold the information we have marked and the submitted audio recording in its entirety 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 department for purposes of the informer's privilege. Accordingly, the department may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 on that basis. As you raise no further exceptions to disclosure, the department 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,



Tim Neal  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

TN/rm

Ref: ID# 821388

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)