



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 4, 2020

Mr. Trey Qualls
Assistant City Attorney
City of Fort Worth
200 Texas Street, 3rd Floor
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2020-06821

Dear Mr. Qualls:

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# 814526 (ORR Nos. W094593 & W094988).

The City of Fort Worth (the "city") received two requests from different requestors for information related to a specified incident. We understand the city will redact dates of birth of members of the public pursuant to the previous determination issued in Open Records Letter No. 2016-00620 (2016).¹ The city states it is withholding certain e-mail addresses under section 552.137 of the Government Code pursuant to Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009).² The city claims some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception the city claims 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 the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information that is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976).

¹ Open Records Letter No. 2016-00620 authorizes the city to withhold public citizens' dates of birth under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy without requesting an attorney general decision. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 at 7-8 (2001) (listing elements of second type of previous determination under section 552.301(a) of the Government Code).

² Open Records Decision No. 684 is a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold certain information without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.

To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both prongs of this test must be satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. Types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court are delineated in *Industrial Foundation*. *Id.* at 683. Upon review, we find the city has not demonstrated any of the information at issue is highly intimate or embarrassing and not of legitimate public concern. Thus, the city may not withhold any portion of the information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 826.0311 of the Health and Safety Code, which states, in relevant part:

(a) Information that is contained in a municipal or county registry of dogs and cats under Section 826.031 that identifies or tends to identify the owner or an address, telephone number, or other personally identifying information of the owner of the registered dog or cat is confidential and not subject to disclosure under [the Act]. The information contained in the registry may not include the social security number or the driver's license number of the owner of the registered animal.

(b) The information may be disclosed only to a governmental entity or a person that, under a contract with a governmental entity, provides animal control services or animal registration services for the governmental entity for purposes related to the protection of public health and safety. A governmental entity or person that receives the information must maintain the confidentiality of the information, may not disclose the information under [the Act], and may not use the information for a purpose that does not directly relate to the protection of public health and safety.

Health & Safety Code § 826.0311(a), (b). The city states some of the submitted information, which it marked, consists of personally identifying information of the owner of a registered animal. The city informs us the information at issue was generated from information maintained in the city's pet registry. The city also states the exception in section 826.0311(b) is not applicable in this instance. Accordingly, the city must withhold the information it marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 826.0311(a) of the Health and Safety Code.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses 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),

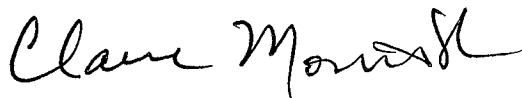
515 at 4 (1988). However, witnesses who provide information in the course of an investigation but do not make a report of the violation are not informants for the purposes of claiming the informer's privilege. The privilege excepts the informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect that 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. Although the city generally claims the common-law informer's privilege for the remaining information, we find the information does not identify a complainant who reported violations of law to the city for purposes of the informer's privilege. Accordingly, the city may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis.

In summary, the city must withhold the information it marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 826.0311(a) of the Health and Safety Code. 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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/mo

Ref: ID# 814526

Enc. Submitted documents

c: 2 Requestor
(w/o enclosures)