



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 24, 2020

Mr. Thomas M. Gilliland
Public Information Officer
Harris County Sheriff's Office
1200 Baker Street, 2nd Floor
Houston, Texas 77002-1206

OR2020-09089

Dear Mr. Gilliland:

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# 818258 (ORR#).20SP9002307

The Harris County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for incident number 191201898. The sheriff's office claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions the sheriff's office claims and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides, in part, as follows:

(a) [T]he following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

(1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and

(2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). The sheriff's office states the submitted information was used or developed in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect conducted by the sheriff's office. *See id.* §§ 101.003(a) (defining "child" for purposes of this section as person under 18 years of age who is not and has not been married or who has not had the disabilities of minority removed for general purposes), 261.001(1), (4) (defining "abuse" and "neglect" for purposes of chapter 261 of the Family Code). Accordingly, we find this information is subject to chapter 261 of the Family Code. The sheriff's office does not indicate it has adopted a rule that governs the release of this type of information and therefore we assume no such regulation exists. Given that assumption, we conclude the sheriff's office must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.¹ *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (predecessor statute).

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/rm

Ref: ID# 818258

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

¹ As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining argument against disclosure of the submitted information.