



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

April 24, 2020

Ms. Cynthia Tynan  
Assistant General Counsel & Public Information Coordinator  
University of Texas System  
210 West Seventh Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2020-11670

Dear Ms. Tynan:

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# 824910 (ORR# 195378).

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (the "university") received a request for police report number 2019-0816-012. The university states it is releasing some of the requested information. The university claims some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception the university claims 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. Section 552.101 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.

The university states the submitted information identifies a complainant who reported violations of criminal laws to the university's police department. Based upon the university's representations and our review, we conclude the university has demonstrated the applicability of the common-law informer's privilege to some of the information at issue, which we have marked. Therefore, the university may withhold the information we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. However, the remaining information at issue does not identify an individual who reported a violation of law for purposes of the informer's privilege. Accordingly, the university may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 on that basis. The university must release the remaining information to this requestor.<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> We note the requestor has a right of access to some of the information being released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(a) (governmental body may not deny access to person to whom information relates or person's agent on ground that information is considered confidential by privacy principles); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individuals request information concerning themselves). Thus, if the university receives another request for the same information from a different requestor, the university must again seek a decision from this office.

Ms. Cynthia Tynan - Page 3

Ref: ID# 824910

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)