



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 12, 2020

Ms. Jacqueline Villarreal
Assistant District Attorney
Hidalgo County
100 East Cano Street
Edinburg, Texas 78539

OR2020-16042

Dear Ms. Villarreal:

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# 832570 (Ref. No. 2020-0066-DA.SO).

The Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for personnel records, including disciplinary records and internal investigations, pertaining to a named former deputy. You state you will release some information to the requestor. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the submitted information contains a peace officer's Texas Commission on Law Enforcement ("TCOLE") identification number. Section 552.002(a) of the Government Code defines "public information" as information that is written, produced, collected, assembled, or maintained under a law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business:

(1) by a governmental body;

(2) for a governmental body and the governmental body:

(A) owns the information;

(B) has a right of access to the information; or

(C) spends or contributes public money for the purpose of writing, producing, collecting, assembling, or maintaining the information;
or

(3) by an individual officer or employee of a governmental body in the officer's or employee's official capacity and the information pertains to official business of the governmental body.

Gov't Code § 552.002(a). In Open Records Decision No. 581 (1990), this office determined certain computer information, such as source codes, documentation information, and other computer programming, that has no significance other than its use as a tool for the maintenance, manipulation, or protection of public property is not the kind of information made public under section 552.021 of the Government Code. Additionally, we understand a TCOLE identification number is a unique computer-generated number assigned to licensees for identification in TCOLE's electronic database and may be used as an access device number on the TCOLE website. Accordingly, we find the submitted TCOLE number is not "public information" for purposes of the Act, and the sheriff's office is not required to release this information in response to this request.¹

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 of the Government Code encompasses chapter 411 of the Government Code, which makes confidential criminal history record information ("CHRI") generated by the National Crime Information Center or by the Texas Crime Information Center. *See id.* § 411.083(a). Title 28, part 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations governs the release of CHRI obtained from the NCIC network or other states. *See* 28 C.F.R. § 20.21. The federal regulations allow each state to follow its individual law with respect to CHRI it generates. Open Records Decision No. 565 at 7 (1990). *See generally* Gov't Code ch. 411 subch. F. Section 411.083 of the Government Code deems confidential CHRI the Texas Department of Public Safety ("DPS") maintains, except DPS may disseminate this information as provided in chapter 411, subchapter F, or subchapter E-1, of the Government Code. *See id.* § 411.083. Sections 411.083(b)(1) and 411.089(a) authorize a criminal justice agency to obtain CHRI; however, a criminal justice agency may not release CHRI except to another criminal justice agency for a criminal justice purpose. *Id.* § 411.089(b)(1). Thus, any CHRI obtained from DPS or any other criminal justice agency not pertaining to the named individual must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with Government Code chapter 411. We further note Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") numbers constitute CHRI generated by the FBI. Therefore, the sheriff's office must withhold the submitted FBI number under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code and federal law.

Section 552.102(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of

¹ As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

personal privacy.”² *Id.* § 552.102(a). The Texas Supreme Court held section 552.102(a) excepts from disclosure the dates of birth of state employees in the payroll database of the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts. *Tex. Comptroller of Pub. Accounts v. Attorney Gen. of Tex.*, 354 S.W.3d 336 (Tex. 2010). Accordingly, the sheriff’s office must withhold the date of birth we marked under section 552.102(a) of the Government Code.

Section 552.117(a)(2) of the Government Code applies to records a governmental body holds in an employment capacity and excepts from public disclosure the home address, home telephone number, emergency contact information, and social security number of a peace officer, as well as information that reveals whether the peace officer has family members, regardless of whether the peace officer complies with sections 552.024 and 552.1175 of the Government Code. *See Gov’t Code* § 552.117(a)(2). Section 552.117(a)(2) applies to peace officers as defined by article 2.12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. We have marked and indicated information under section 552.117 that consists of the personal information of a peace officer who was employed by the sheriff’s office and the information is held in the employment context. In this instance, however, it is unclear whether the individual whose information is at issue is currently a licensed peace officer as defined by article 2.12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Accordingly, if the individual whose information is at issue is currently a licensed peace officer as defined by article 2.12, then the sheriff’s office must withhold the information we marked and indicated under section 552.117(a)(2) of the Government Code.

If the information we marked under section 552.117 of the Government Code pertains to an individual who is no longer a licensed peace officer, then the marked information may be subject to section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code. Section 552.117(a)(1) excepts from disclosure the home address and telephone number, emergency contact information, social security number, and family member information of a current or former employee of a governmental body who requests this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. *See id.* § 552.117(a)(1). Whether a particular item of information is protected by section 552.117(a)(1) must be determined at the time of the governmental body’s receipt of the request for the information. *See Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989)*. Thus, information may be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) only on behalf of a current or former employee who made a request for confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date of the governmental body’s receipt of the request for the information. Information may not be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) on behalf of a current or former employee who did not timely request under section 552.024 the information be kept confidential. Therefore, if the individual whose information is at issue is no longer a peace officer as defined by article 2.12 and if this individual timely requested confidentiality under section 552.024 of the Government Code, then the sheriff’s office must withhold the information we marked and indicated under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code.

² The Office of the Attorney General will raise mandatory exceptions on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See Open Records Decision No. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987)*.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code provides information relating to a motor vehicle operator's license, driver's license, motor vehicle title or registration, or personal identification document issued by an agency of this state or another state or country is excepted from public release. *See* Gov't Code § 552.130. Accordingly, the sheriff's office must withhold the motor vehicle record information we marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information that (1) contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668 (Tex. 1976). In Open Records Decision No. 393 (1983), this office concluded information that either identifies or tends to identify a victim of sexual assault or other sex-related offense must be withheld under common-law privacy. ORD 393 at 2; *see* Open Records Decision No. 339 (1982); *see also Morales v. Ellen*, 840 S.W.2d at 519 (Tex. App.—El Paso 1992, writ denied) (identity of witnesses to and victims of sexual harassment was highly intimate or embarrassing information and public did not have a legitimate interest in such information). In *Ellen*, the court addressed the applicability of the common-law privacy doctrine to files of an investigation of allegations of sexual harassment. In addition, the Third Court of Appeals has concluded public citizens' dates of birth are protected by common-law privacy pursuant to section 552.101. *See Paxton v. City of Dallas*, No. 03-13-00546-CV, 2015 WL 3394061, at *3 (Tex. App.—Austin May 22, 2015, pet. denied) (mem. op.). However, this office has concluded the public has a legitimate interest in information that relates to public employees and their conduct in the workplace. *See, e.g.,* Open Records Decision Nos. 562 at 10 (1990) (personnel file information does not involve most intimate aspects of human affairs but in fact touches on matters of legitimate public concern), 470 at 4 (job performance does not generally constitute public employee's private affairs), 444 at 3 (1986) (public has obvious interest in information concerning qualifications and performance of government employees), 405 at 2 (1983) (manner in which public employee's job was performed cannot be said to be of minimal public interest), 392 (1982) (reasons for employee's resignation ordinarily not private). We note an individual's name, address, and telephone number are generally not private information under common-law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision No. 554 at 3 (1990) (disclosure of person's name, address, or telephone number not an invasion of privacy).

You seek to withhold portions of the submitted information under common-law privacy and the ruling in *Ellen*. We note the ruling in *Ellen* was applicable to investigations involving sexual harassment in the workplace. In this instance, we find the information at issue does not pertain to a sexual harassment investigation in the employment context so as to fall under the holding in *Ellen*. Accordingly, we conclude the ruling in *Ellen* is not applicable in this situation, and the sheriff's office may not withhold the information at issue under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis. Upon review, we find the sheriff's office must withhold all public citizens' dates of birth in the remaining information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with

common-law privacy. However, we find you have not demonstrated any portion of the remaining information is highly intimate or embarrassing and not of legitimate public concern. Thus, the sheriff's office may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of constitutional privacy. Constitutional privacy consists of two interrelated types of privacy: (1) the right to make certain kinds of decisions independently, and (2) an individual's interest in avoiding disclosure of personal matters. Open Records Decision No. 455 at 4 (1987). The first type protects an individual's autonomy within "zones of privacy" which include matters related to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relationships, and child rearing and education. *Id.* The second type of constitutional privacy requires a balancing between the individual's privacy interests and the public's need to know information of public concern. *Id.* The scope of information protected is narrower than that under the common law doctrine of privacy; the information must concern the "most intimate aspects of human affairs." *Id.* at 5 (quoting *Ramie v. City of Hedwig Village, Texas*, 765 F.2d 490 (5th Cir. 1985)). Upon review, we find the sheriff's office failed to demonstrate any portion of the remaining information falls within the zones of privacy or implicates an individual's privacy interests for purposes of constitutional privacy. Therefore, the sheriff's office may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 on the basis of constitutional privacy.

In summary, the TCOLE identification number is not subject to the Act and the sheriff's office need not release it to the requestor. The sheriff's office must withhold the submitted FBI number under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 411.083 of the Government Code. The sheriff's office must withhold the date of birth we marked under section 552.102(a) of the Government Code. If the individual whose information is at issue is currently a licensed peace officer as defined by article 2.12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, then the sheriff's office must withhold the information we marked and indicated under section 552.117(a)(2) of the Government Code. If the individual is no longer a peace officer as defined by article 2.12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and if this individual timely requested confidentiality under section 552.024 of the Government Code, then the sheriff's office must withhold the information we marked and indicated under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code.³ The sheriff's office must withhold the motor vehicle record information we marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The sheriff's office must withhold all public citizens' dates of birth under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The sheriff's office must release the remaining responsive information.

³ We note, regardless of the applicability of section 552.117 of the Government Code to the individual's social security number, section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act. *See* Gov't Code § 552.147(b).

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,

Michelle Garza
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MRG/gw

Ref: ID# 832570

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)