



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 16, 2020

Ms. Tiffany Bangs  
Assistant County Attorney  
Harris County Constable, Precinct 8  
1019 Congress, 15<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2020-17777

Dear Ms. Bangs:

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# 837120 (C.A. File No. 20PIA0312).

The Harris County Constable's Office, Precinct 8 (the "constable's office") received a request for information pertaining to a specified motor vehicle accident. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 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. Section 552.101 encompasses information subject to chapter 550 of the Transportation Code. Section 550.065 applies only to a written report of an accident required under section 550.061, 550.062, or 601.004. *See Transp. Code* § 550.065(a)(1). Chapter 550 requires the creation of a written report when the accident resulted in injury to or the death of a person or damage to the property of any person to the apparent extent of \$1,000 or more. *Id.* §§ 550.061 (operator's accident report), .062 (officer's accident report). An accident report is privileged and for the confidential use of the Texas Department of Transportation or a local governmental agency of Texas that has use for the information for accident prevention purposes. *Id.* § 550.065(b). However, a governmental entity shall release an accident report in accordance with subsections (c) and (c-1). *Id.* § 550.065(c), (c-1). Section 550.065(c) provides a governmental entity shall release an accident report to a person or entity listed under this subsection. *Id.* § 550.065(c). Here, the requestor is a person listed under section 550.065(c). Although the constable's office asserts section

552.108 to withhold the information, a statutory right of access prevails over the Act's general exceptions to public disclosure. *See, e.g.*, Open Records Decision Nos. 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exception to disclosure under the Act). Because section 552.108 is a general exception under the Act, the requestor's statutory access under section 550.065(c) prevails and the constable's office may not withhold the information under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Thus, the constable's office must release the accident report to the requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c).

Section 552.108(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if: (1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]” Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(1) must explain how and why the release of the information at issue would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706, 710 (Tex. 1977). The constable's office states the remaining information relates to a pending investigation or prosecution. We note the remaining information includes a citation. Because the individual who was cited received a copy of the citation, we find release of the citation will not interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. Therefore, the constable's office may not withhold the citation under section 552.108(a)(1). Based on this representation, we conclude the release of the remaining information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177, 186-87 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (delineating law enforcement interests present in active cases), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, we find section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the remaining information.

However, we note section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Thus, with the exception of the basic information and the marked citation, the constable's office may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

Section 552.101 encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). Under the common-law right of privacy, an individual has a right to be free from the publicizing of private affairs in which the public has no legitimate concern. *Id.* at 682. 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.). Accordingly, the constable's office must withhold the public citizen's date of birth we marked in the submitted citation under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

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(a). Thus, the constable's office must withhold the motor vehicle record information we marked within the citation under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, the constable's office must release the accident report to the requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c). With the exception of the marked citation and the basic information, the constable's office may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. In releasing the citation, the constable's office must withhold the public citizen's date of birth we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy and the motor vehicle record information we marked under section 552.130.

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,

Melanie Villars  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MJV/gw

Ref: ID# 837120

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)