



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 18, 2020

Ms. Kelley Messer
First Assistant City Attorney
City of Abilene
P.O. Box 60
Abilene, Texas 79604-0060

OR2020-20640

Dear Ms. Messer:

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# 840320.

The City of Abilene (the "city") received a request for all information pertaining to a named individual, including a specified incident report. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.152 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

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 statutes that make information confidential, such as section 261.201(a) of the Family Code, which provides as follows:

(a) Except as provided by Section 261.203, the following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under [the Act] 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 We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

(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). Upon review, we find the submitted information was used or developed in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect under chapter 261. *See id.* § 261.001(1), (4) (defining “abuse” and “neglect” for purposes of chapter 261 of the Family Code); *see also id.* § 101.003(a) (defining “child” for purposes of chapter 261). Thus, the submitted information is subject to section 261.201. As you do not indicate the city has adopted a rule that governs the release of this type of information, we assume no such rule exists. Given that assumption, we conclude the submitted information is generally confidential under section 261.201 (a) of the Family Code.

However, section 261.201 provides information encompassed by subsection (a) may be disclosed “for purposes consistent with [the Family Code] and applicable federal or state law.” *Id.* § 261.201(a). Subchapter E of chapter 264 of the Family Code concerns the establishment and duties of children's advocacy centers. *See id.* §§ 264.401-.411. Section 264.405 of the Family Code directs children's advocacy centers to provide services for victims of child abuse and their families. *Id.* § 264.405. Furthermore, section 264.408(c) of the Family Code provides “a law enforcement agency . . . may share with a [children's advocacy] center information that is confidential under Section 261.201 as needed to provide services” under chapter 264 of the Family Code. *Id.* § 264.408(c).

In this instance, the requestor is a representative of the Big Country Court Appointed Special Advocates (“CASA”). However, the requestor does not state whether the requested report is sought for the purposes of providing services under chapter 264 of the Family Code. Therefore, we must rule conditionally. If the city determines the information subject to section 261.201 is not needed to provide services under chapter 264, then it may not release the information on that ground, and the city must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.² If, however, the city determines the information at issue is needed to provide services under chapter 264 of the Family Code, then the city generally has the discretion to release the information at issue to this requestor pursuant to section 264.408(c). We note information shared with or provided to CASA under section 264.408(c) retains its confidentiality under section 261.201(a) of the Family Code. *See id.* Although you raise section 552.152 of the Government Code for the submitted information, the requestor’s specific statutory right of access prevails over the general exceptions in the Act. *See Open Records Decisions Nos. 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 at 4(1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exceptions to disclosure under the Act).*

² As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure of this information.

You also assert the submitted information is also subject to section 58.008 of the Family Code. Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 58.008 of the Family Code, which provides, in part:

(b) Except as provided by Subsection (d), law enforcement records concerning a child and information concerning a child that are stored by electronic means or otherwise and from which a record could be generated may not be disclosed to the public and shall be:

(1) if maintained on paper or microfilm, kept separate from adult records;

(2) if maintained electronically in the same computer system as adult records, accessible only under controls that are separate and distinct from the controls to access electronic data concerning adults; and

(3) maintained on a local basis only and not sent to a central state or federal depository, except as provided by Subsection (c) or Subchapter B, D, or E.

Id. § 58.008(b); *see also id.* § 51.03(a) (defining “delinquent conduct” for purposes of title 3 of Family Code). Section 58.008(b) is applicable to records of juvenile conduct that occurred before, on, or after September 1, 2017. *See* Act of May 28, 2017, 85th Leg., R.S., ch. 746, § 22, 2017 Tex. Sess. Law Serv. 3173, 3187. The juvenile must have been at least 10 years old and less than 17 years of age when the conduct occurred. *See* Fam. Code § 51.02(2) (defining “child” for purposes of title 3 of Family Code). We find the submitted information involves a juvenile offender, so as to fall within the scope of section 58.008(b). It does not appear that any of the exceptions in section 58.008 apply; therefore, the submitted information is generally confidential under section 58.008(b) of the Family Code.

If the city determines the information at issue is needed to provide services under chapter 264 of the Family Code, there is a conflict between section 58.008(b) of the Family Code and section 264.408 of the Family Code. Where information falls within both general and specific statutory provisions, the specific provision prevails over the general provision unless the general provision was enacted later and there is clear evidence that the legislature intended the general provision to prevail. *See* Gov’t Code § 311.026(b); *Cuellar v. State*, 521 S.W.2d 277 (Tex. Crim. App. 1975) (under well-established rule of statutory construction, specific statutory provisions prevail over general ones). Section 264.408 allows the Department of Family and Protective Services, a law enforcement agency, and a prosecuting attorney to share with child advocacy centers information that is confidential under section 261.201 as needed to provide services under chapter 264 of the Family Code. *See* Fam. Code § 264.408(c). Conversely, section 58.008(b) prohibits any member of the public from obtaining any and all law enforcement records of any incident in which a juvenile is engaged in delinquent conduct or conduct indicating a need for supervision. *See id.* § 58.008(b). Accordingly, with regard to the conflict between section 58.008(b) and section 264.408(c), we find section 264.408(c) is the more specific statute in this instance. Accordingly, section 264.408(c) prevails over section 58.008(b), and the city has the

discretion to release the submitted information to the requestor pursuant to section 264.408(c) if the city determines the submitted information is needed to provide services under chapter 264 of the Family Code.

In summary, if the city determines the submitted information is needed to provide services under chapter 264 of the Family Code, then the city has the discretion to release the submitted information to this requestor pursuant to section 264.408(c) of the Family Code. If, however, the city determines the submitted information is not needed to provide services under chapter 264 of the Family Code, then it may not release the information on that ground, and the city must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.

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,

Ashley Crutchfield
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

AC/jxd

Ref: ID# 840320

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)