



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 19, 2020

Ms. Marcialyn Hooper
Open Records Coordinator
Dallas Animal Services
1818 North Westmoreland Road
Dallas, Texas 75212

OR2020-20806

Dear Ms. Hooper:

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# 842071 (ORR# C004288).

The City of Dallas (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to a specified animal. The city claims some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the claimed exception and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.²

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. This exception encompasses section 826.0311 of the Health and Safety Code, which states, in part, the following:

- (a) Information that is contained in a municipal or county registry of dogs and cats under Section 826.031 that identifies or tends to identify the owner

¹ Although the city also raises section 552.1177 of the Government Code, it has not submitted arguments explaining how this exception applies to the submitted information. Therefore, we presume the city no longer asserts this exception. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302.

² We assume 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 those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

or an address, telephone number, or other personally identifying information of the owner of the registered dog or cat is confidential and not subject to disclosure under [the Act]. The information contained in the registry may not include the social security number or the driver's license number of the owner of the registered animal.

(b) The information may be disclosed only to a governmental entity or a person that, under a contract with a governmental entity, provides animal control services or animal registration services for the governmental entity for purposes related to the protection of public health and safety. A governmental entity or person that receives the information must maintain the confidentiality of the information, may not disclose the information under [the Act], and may not use the information for a purpose that does not directly relate to the protection of public health and safety.

Health & Safety Code § 826.0311(a), (b). We note section 826.0311 is applicable only to information contained in a municipal or county registry of dogs and cats. We further note because section 826.0311 was intended to protect the personal privacy of pet owners, this statute is applicable only to information pertaining to natural persons, and does not protect information relating to business, governmental, and other artificial entities. *See* House Comm. On County Affairs, Bill Analysis, Tex. H.B. 3262 76th Leg., R.S. (1999) (provision intended to protect "businesses" from gaining access to "personal information"). Upon review, we find the city has failed to establish section 826.0311 is applicable to the submitted information. Accordingly, the city may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that ground.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses information protected by section 801.353 of the Occupations Code, which provides, in relevant part, the following:

(a) A veterinarian may not violate the confidential relationship between the veterinarian and the veterinarian's client.

(b) A veterinarian may not be required to release information concerning the veterinarian's care of an animal, except on the veterinarian's receipt of:

(1) a written authorization or other form of waiver executed by the client; or

(2) an appropriate court order or subpoena.

Occ. Code § 801.353(a), (b). Section 801.353 limits a veterinarian's release of information concerning the veterinarian's care of an animal to certain circumstances. *See id.* Upon review, we find some of the submitted information, which we have marked, consists of veterinary records of a veterinarian employed by the city. The city does not inform us it has obtained permission from the owner or caretaker of the animal whose records are at issue to release the animal's records. *See id.* § 801.351(a)(1) (defining "client" as "owner or other caretaker of the animal"). Further, the city states the requestor has not produced an appropriate court order or subpoena to release the information at issue. Accordingly,

the city must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 801.353 of the Occupations Code. However, the remaining information is not confidential under the 801.353, and the city may not withhold it under section 552.101 on that ground. Therefore, the city must release the remaining information.

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,

James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/rm

Ref: ID# 842071

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)