



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 1, 2020

Ms. Jo Ann Pate
Assistant City Attorney
City of Fort Worth
200 Texas Street, 3rd Floor
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2020-21902

Dear Ms. Pate:

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# 843354 (Ref. No. W101563).

The City of Fort Worth (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to two named individuals and a specified address during a specified time period. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 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 public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses common-law privacy, which protects information that is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both prongs of this test must be satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. This office has found a compilation of an individual's criminal history is highly embarrassing information, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person. *Cf. United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (when considering prong regarding individual's privacy interest, court recognized distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of information and noted that individual has significant privacy interest in compilation of one's criminal history). Furthermore, we find a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public.

The present request seeks all reports pertaining to two named individuals. This request requires the city to compile the named individuals' criminal histories and implicates each named individual's right to privacy. Therefore, to the extent the city maintains law enforcement records listing either of the named individuals as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the city must generally withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

However, information that refers to an individual solely as a victim, witness, or involved person is not part of a compilation of the individual's criminal history and may not be withheld under section 552.101 on that basis. We note you have submitted information in which neither named individual is depicted as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant. This information does not implicate the privacy interests of the individuals and may not be withheld as a compilation of criminal history. Accordingly, we will address your arguments against disclosure of this information.

We note the requestor is a representative of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (the "DFPS"). Section 411.114(a) of the Government Code states, in pertinent part:

(2) The [DFPS] or the Health and Human Services Commission [{"HHSC"}], as applicable, shall obtain from the [Department of Public Safety ("DPS")] criminal history record information [{"CHRI"}] maintained by [DPS] that relates to a person who is:

...

(I) an alleged perpetrator in a report the [DFPS] or [HHSC] receives alleging that the person has abused, neglected, or exploited a child, an elderly person, or a person with a disability, provided that:

(i) the report alleges the person has engaged in conduct that meets the applicable definition of abuse, neglect, or exploitation under Chapter 261, Family Code, or Chapter 48, Human Resources Code; and

(ii) the person is not also the victim of the alleged conduct[.]

...

(4) Subject to Section 411.087, the [DFPS] and the [HHSC] are entitled to:

...

(B) obtain from any other criminal justice agency in this state [CHRI] maintained by that criminal justice agency that relates to a person described by Subdivision (2) or (3). Law enforcement entities shall expedite the furnishing of such information to [DFPS] workers or [HHSC] workers, as applicable, to ensure prompt

criminal background checks for the safety of alleged victims and [DFPS] workers or [HHSC] workers, as applicable.

Gov't Code § 411.114(a)(2)(I), (4)(B). For purposes of section 411.114, CHRI consists of “information collected about a person by a criminal justice agency that consists of identifiable descriptions and notations of arrests, detentions, indictments, informations, and other formal criminal charges and their dispositions.” *See id.* § 411.082(2). Thus, these provisions may grant the DFPS investigator a right of access to CHRI in the information at issue, to the extent it exists. We note a statutory right of access prevails over a claim under common-law privacy, as well as the general exceptions under the Act. *See Collins v. Tex Mall, L.P.*, 297 S.W.3d 409, 415 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2009, no pet.) (statutory provision controls and preempts common law only when statute directly conflicts with common-law principle); *see also CenterPoint Energy Houston Elec. LLC v. Harris County Toll Rd. Auth.*, 436 F.3d 541, 544 (5th Cir. 2006) (common law controls only where there is no conflicting or controlling statutory law); Open Records Decision No. 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exceptions to disclosure under the Act). The requestor does not specifically state whether either of the named individuals of the requested information is an alleged perpetrator in a report received by DFPS of abuse or neglect of a child. Thus, we are unable to conclude that section 411.114 of the Government Code gives the requestor a right of access to any of the requested information, and we must rule conditionally. Therefore, if neither of the named individuals at issue in the requested information is an alleged perpetrator in a report received by DFPS of abuse or neglect of a child, then the city is not required to release the CHRI pursuant to section 411.114. However, if either of the named individuals at issue is an alleged perpetrator in a report received by DFPS of abuse or neglect of a child, then the requestor is generally authorized by section 411.114 of the Government Code to obtain CHRI from the city regarding that individual. *See id.* § 411.114.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 58.008(b) of the Family Code, which provides as follows:

Except as provided by Subsection (c), 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.

Fam. Code § 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 ten years old and less than seventeen years of age when the conduct occurred. *See* Fam. Code § 51.02(2) (defining “child” for purposes of title 3 of Family Code). In this instance, one of the named individuals was a juvenile on the date the city received this request, and to the extent any such information exists, reports involving that named individual as a juvenile offender fall within the scope of section 58.008(b). It does not appear any of the exceptions in section 58.008 apply. Accordingly, any CHRI contained in a report involving that individual as a juvenile offender must generally be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 58.008(b) of the Family Code. Therefore, to the extent any such information exists, we must address the conflict between confidentiality under section 58.008(b) of the Family Code and the requestor’s right of access under section 411.114 of the Government Code.

Where information falls within both a general and a specific statutory provision, the specific provision prevails over the general statute. *See* Gov’t Code § 311.026 (where general statutory provision conflicts with specific provision, specific provision prevails as exception to general provision unless the general provision is the later enactment and the manifest intent is that the general provision prevail); *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). While section 58.008(b) generally makes juvenile law enforcement records confidential, section 411.114 of the Government Code gives one specific requestor, DFPS, access to particular information, CHRI, found in records involving particular individuals, alleged perpetrators in a DFPS report of abuse or neglect of a child. *See* Gov’t Code § 411.114; Fam. Code § 58.008(b). Thus, the statutory right of access granted to DFPS by section 411.114 of the Government Code prevails over the more general confidentiality provision of section 58.008(b) of the Family Code. Therefore, if the city determines either subject at issue is an alleged perpetrator in a report received by DFPS of abuse or neglect of a child, then the city may not withhold CHRI pertaining to that individual under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 58.008(b) of the Family Code.

As stated above, section 552.101 of the Government of the Code encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy. Types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court are delineated in *Industrial Foundation*. *Indus. Found.*, 540 S.W.2d at 683. Additionally, this office has concluded some kinds of medical information are generally highly intimate or embarrassing. *See* Open Records Decision No. 455 (1987). The 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.). Upon review, we conclude some of the remaining information meets the standard articulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation*. Accordingly, the city must withhold all public citizens’ dates of birth and the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, we find no portion of the remaining information is highly intimate or embarrassing and of no legitimate public concern, and the city may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 of the Government Code on the basis of 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.¹ *See* Gov't Code § 552.130. Accordingly, the city must withhold the motor vehicle record information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, to the extent the city maintains law enforcement records listing either of the named individuals as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the city must generally withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy; however, if either subject in the requested information is an alleged perpetrator in a report received by DFPS of abuse or neglect of a child, then to the extent it exists, the city must release CHRI pertaining to that individual pursuant to section 411.114 of the Government Code. The city must withhold all public citizens' dates of birth and the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The city must withhold the motor vehicle record information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. 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,

Meredith L. Coffman
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MLC/jm

Ref: ID# 843354

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

¹ The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).