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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 23, 2020

Mr. Trenton M. Dietz  
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City of Abilene  
P.O. Box 60  
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OR2020-23907

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# 845878 (ORR# 20-1386).

The Abilene Police Department (the "department") received a request for all records pertaining to a named individual during a specified time period. The department claims the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception the department claims.

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 a named individual. This request requires the department to compile the named individual's criminal history and implicates the

named individual's right to privacy. Therefore, to the extent the department maintains law enforcement records listing the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the department must generally withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

However, 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. *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). The requestor does not specifically state whether the named individual is an alleged perpetrator in a report received by DFPS of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of child, an elderly person, or a person with a disability. Thus, we are unable to determine whether 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 the named individual is not an alleged perpetrator in a report received by DFPS of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of child, an elderly person, or a person with a disability, then the department is not required to release the CHRI pursuant to section 411.114. However, if the named individual is an alleged perpetrator in a report received by DFPS of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of child, an elderly person, or a person with a disability, then the requestor is generally authorized by section 411.114 of the Government Code to obtain CHRI from the department regarding that individual. *See id.* § 411.114.

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 (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. The juvenile must have been at least 10 years old and less than 17 years of age when the conduct occurred. *See id.* § 51.02(2) (defining “child” for purposes of title 3 of Family Code). In this instance, the named individual is a juvenile, and to the extent any such information exists, reports involving the 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 the 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 id.* § 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, neglect, or exploitation of an elderly. *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 department determines the subject at issue is an alleged perpetrator in a report received by DFPS of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of child, an elderly person, or a person with a disability, then the department 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.

In summary, to the extent the department maintains law enforcement records listing the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the department must generally withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy; however, if the named individual is an alleged perpetrator in a report received by DFPS of abuse, neglect or exploitation of child, an elderly person, or a person with a disability, then to the extent it exists, the department must release CHRI pertaining to the named individual pursuant to section 411.114 of the Government 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,

Claire V. Morris Sloan  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

CVMS/rm

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Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)