



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 23, 2020

Mr. Robert Schell
Assistant County & District Attorney
Ellis County & District Attorney's Office
109 South Jackson
Waxahachie, Texas 75165

OR2020-23911

Dear Mr. Schell:

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# 848697.

The Ellis County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You claim some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.130 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, you state some of the requested information was the subject of a previous request for a ruling, as a result of which this office issued Open Records Letter No. 2020-12284 (2020). In that ruling, we determined 1) the sheriff's office may withhold the marked information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code, 2) the sheriff's office must withhold the marked motor vehicle record information under section 552.130 of the Government Code, 3) the sheriff's office may withhold the social security number(s) under section 552.147, and 4) the sheriff's office must withhold the marked date(s) of birth pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. You state the law, facts, or circumstances on which the prior ruling was based have not changed. Thus, the sheriff's office may continue to rely on Open Records Letter No. 2020-12284 as a previous determination and withhold or release the information at

¹ Although you also raise section 552.137 of the Government Code, you make no arguments to support this exception. Therefore, we assume you have withdrawn your claim that this section applies to the submitted information. See Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302.

issue in accordance with that ruling. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (so long as law, facts, and circumstances on which prior ruling was based have not changed, first type of previous determination exists where requested information is precisely same information as was addressed in a prior attorney general ruling, ruling is addressed to same governmental body, and ruling concludes that information is or is not excepted from disclosure).

Section 552.108(a)(1) 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). You state the information you have marked relates to a pending criminal investigation. Based on this representation, we conclude the release of this 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). Therefore, the sheriff’s office may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

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 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 court of appeals has concluded public citizens’ dates of birth are protected by common-law privacy pursuant to section 552.101. *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.). Thus, the sheriff’s office must withhold all public citizens’ dates of birth under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.1175 of the Government Code protects the home address, home telephone number, emergency contact information, date of birth, social security number, and family member information of certain individuals, when that information is held by a governmental body in a non-employment capacity and the individual elects to keep the information confidential. Gov’t Code § 552.1175. Section 552.1175 applies, in part, to “peace officers as defined by Article 2.12, Code of Criminal Procedure[.]” *Id.* § 552.1175(a)(1). Section 552.1175 also encompasses a personal cellular telephone number, unless the cellular telephone service is paid for by a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision No. 506 at 5-7 (1988) (statutory predecessor to section 552.117 not applicable to cellular telephone numbers provided and paid for by governmental body and intended for official use). Thus, to the extent the information you have marked relates to a licensed peace officer who elects to restrict access to their information in accordance with section 552.1175(b), it must be withheld from disclosure under section 552.1175 of the

Government Code; however, any cellular telephone numbers may only be withheld under section 552.1175 if a governmental body does not pay for the cellular services. If the individual whose information is at issue is not currently a licensed peace officer or does not elect to restrict access to the information in accordance with section 552.1175(b), the marked information may not be withheld under section 552.1175.

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 a personal identification document issued by an agency of this state or another state or country is excepted from public release. Gov't Code § 552.130. Accordingly, we find the sheriff's office must withhold the motor vehicle record information you have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, the sheriff's office may continue to rely on Open Records Letter No. 2020-12284 as a previous determination and withhold or release the information at issue in accordance with that ruling. The sheriff's office may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. The sheriff's office must withhold all public citizens' dates of birth under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. To the extent the information you have marked relates to a licensed peace officer who elects to restrict access to their information in accordance with section 552.1175(b), it must be withheld from disclosure under section 552.1175 of the Government Code; however, any cellular telephone numbers may only be withheld under section 552.1175 if a governmental body does not pay for the cellular services. The sheriff's office must withhold the motor vehicle record information you have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The sheriff's office 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/rm

Mr. Robert Schell - Page 4

Ref: ID# 848697

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)