



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 7, 2022

Ms. Sarah Parker
Associate General Counsel
Texas Department of Transportation
125 East 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2022-00585

Dear Ms. Parker:

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# 925025 (ORR# R007367).

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for all records related to construction at a specified location. The department claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception the department claims and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

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 section encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information if it is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) is 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. Types of information considered to be intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court are delineated in *Industrial Foundation*. *Id.* at 683. Prior decisions of this office have determined personal financial information not related to a

¹ 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.

transaction between an individual and a governmental body generally meets the first prong of the common-law privacy test. *See generally* Open Records Decision No. 600 (1992). However, whether financial information is subject to a legitimate public interest and, therefore, not protected by common-law privacy must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *See* Open Records Decision No. 373 (1983).

The department states the submitted certified payroll records pertain solely to transactions between a highway project's contractors, subcontractors, and their employees. The department informs this office federal law provides, as a requisite to the receipt of federal funding for the construction projects at issue, the department must receive and retain payroll records from its contractors and subcontractors so the Federal Highway Administration, the Department of Labor, the General Accounting Office, or other federal agencies can audit those records to ensure the contractors' and subcontractors' compliance with applicable federal wage regulations. *See* 23 C.F.R. § 635.118. Additionally, the department informs this office the department has not itself used the payroll records for any public purpose, other than receiving and retaining them for review by a federal agency. Upon review, we find the submitted certified payroll records satisfy the standard articulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation*. Therefore, based upon these facts, we conclude there is no legitimate public interest in release of the submitted certified payroll records at this time. Accordingly, the department must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

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/jm

Ref: ID# 925025

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)