



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 26, 2022

Mr. Andrew Wipke
Assistant County Attorney
Fort Bend County Attorney's Office
401 Jackson Street, 3rd Floor
Richmond, Texas 77469

OR2022-02152

Dear Mr. Wipke:

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# 928378.

The Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for a specified incident report. You state the sheriff's office will release some information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, 552.130, 552.136, 552.137, and 552.147 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

The submitted information involves an alleged violation of section 32.51 of the Penal Code, which provides, "[a] person commits an offense if the person, with the intent to harm or defraud another, obtains, possesses, transfers, or uses an item of . . . identifying information of another person without the other person's consent[.]" Penal Code § 32.51(b)(1). For purposes of section 32.51, "identifying information" includes an individual's name and financial institution account number. *Id.* § 32.51(a)(1)(A), (C). Article 2.29 of the Code of Criminal Procedure pertains to alleged violations of section 32.51 that occurred on or after September 1, 2005, and provides:

(a) A peace officer to whom an alleged violation of Section 32.51, Penal Code, is reported shall make a written report to the law enforcement agency that employs the peace officer that includes the following information:

¹ Although you do not raise sections 552.101, 552.130, 552.136, 552.137, and 552.147 of the Government Code in your brief, we understand you to raise these exceptions based on your markings.

- (1) the name of the victim;
- (2) the name of the suspect, if known;
- (3) the type of identifying information obtained, possessed, transferred, or used in violation of Section 32.51, Penal Code; and
- (4) the results of any investigation.

(b) On the victim's request, the law enforcement agency shall provide the report created under Subsection (a) to the victim. In providing the report, the law enforcement agency shall redact any otherwise confidential information that is included in the report, other than the information described by Subsection (a).

Crim. Proc. Code art. 2.29. For purposes of article 2.29, an offense is committed on or after September 1, 2005, if no "element of the offense occurs before that date." Act of Jun. 17, 2005, 79th Leg., R.S., ch. 294, § 1(b), 2005 Tex. Gen. Laws 885.

In this instance, the submitted information pertains to a report of fraudulent use of identifying information, which constitutes an alleged violation of section 32.51, and the conduct at issue occurred after September 1, 2005. We note the requestor is the victim of the alleged identity theft listed in the report. Therefore, the submitted information is subject to article 2.29 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. *See* Crim. Proc. Code art. 2.29. Although the department seeks to withhold the submitted information under section 552.108 of the Government Code, this exception does not make information confidential. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 586 (1991) (governmental body may waive section 552.108). Therefore, the submitted information may not be withheld under section 552.108 of the Government Code.

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. Section 552.101 encompasses the doctrine of 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. Types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court are delineated in *Industrial Foundation*. *Id.* at 683. 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.). We note the requestor has a right of access to her own information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(a) ("a person or person's authorized representative has a special right of access, beyond the right of the general public, to information held by a governmental body that relates to a person and that is protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect that person's privacy

interests”); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individual requests information concerning herself). Thus, the sheriff’s office may not withhold information pertaining to the requestor under section 552.101 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. Gov’t Code § 552.130. We note, however, because section 552.130 is designed to protect the privacy of individuals, the requestor has a right of access to her motor vehicle record information pursuant to section 552.023 of the Government Code. *See id.* § 552.023(a); ORD 481 at 4. Accordingly, the sheriff’s office may not withhold the motor vehicle record information you marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

Section 552.136(b) of the Government Code provides, “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential.” Gov’t Code § 552.136(b). Because section 552.136 also protects personal privacy, the requestor has a right of access to her own information. *See id.* § 552.023(a); ORD 481 at 4. Accordingly, the sheriff’s office may not withhold information pertaining to the requestor under section 552.136 of the Government Code. However, the sheriff’s office must withhold the routing number and bank account number not belonging to the requestor under section 552.136 of the Government Code.

Section 552.137 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body” unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c). Gov’t Code § 552.137(a)-(c). We note the requestor has a right of access to her own e-mail address pursuant to section 552.137(b) of the Government Code. *See id.* § 552.137(b). Accordingly, the sheriff’s office may not withhold the e-mail address you marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code.

Section 552.147 of the Government Code provides that “[t]he social security number of a living person is excepted from” required public disclosure under the Act. *Id.* § 552.147(a). Section 552.147 is designed to protect individual privacy interests. *See id.* § 552.023. Accordingly, the sheriff’s office may not withhold the requestor’s social security number from her under section 552.147 of the Government Code.

In summary, the sheriff’s office must withhold the routing number and bank account number not belonging to the requestor under section 552.136 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,

Jahna Ward
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JW/be

Ref: ID# 928378

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)