



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 24, 2022

Mr. Anthony Paul
Assistant District Attorney
Denton County
P.O. Box 2344
Denton, Texas 76202

OR2022-08537

Dear Mr. Paul:

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# 938402 (PIR #22-148).

The Denton County Criminal District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney's office") received a request for information pertaining to a specified cause number. You state you have released some information to the requestor. We understand you will redact social security number pursuant to section 552.147(b) of the Government Code.¹ You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.108, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the submitted information includes a court-filed document subject to section 552.022(a)(17) of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a)(17) provides for required public disclosure of "information that is also contained in a public court record[.]" unless it is "made confidential under [the Act] or other law[.]" Gov't Code

¹ Section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office. See Gov't Code § 552.147(b).

§ 552.022(a)(17). You seek to withhold the information subject to section 552.022(a)(17) under sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code. However, these sections are discretionary in nature and do not make information confidential under the Act. *See Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469, 475-76 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive Gov’t Code § 552.103); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to Gov’t Code § 552.108 subject to waiver). Therefore, the court-filed document, which we marked, may not be withheld under section 552.103 or section 552.108 of the Government Code. In addition, you seek to withhold the information at issue under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, we note common-law privacy is not applicable to information contained in public court records. *See Cox Broad. Corp. v. Cohn*, 420 U.S. 469, 496 (1975) (acting for invasion of privacy cannot be maintained where information is in public domain); *Star-Telegram, Inc. v. Walker*, 834 S.W.2d 54, 57 (Tex. 1992) (law cannot recall information once in public domain). Therefore, no portion of the marked court-filed document may be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, because section 552.130 of the Government Code can make information confidential for purposes of section 552.022, we will address its applicability to the court-filed document. Further, we will address your arguments against disclosure of the remaining information not subject to section 552.022.

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 . . . 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 requested information 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 (Tex. 1977). The district attorney’s office states the remaining information pertains to a pending criminal prosecution. Based upon this representation, we conclude the release of the information at issue 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 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases), *writ ref’d n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the remaining information.

However, we note section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov’t Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to basic information). We note basic information includes, among other items, a detailed

description of the offense and the identities of the complainants, but does not include the identities of any witnesses or victims who are not complainants, phone numbers, or motor vehicle record information subject to section 552.130 of the Government Code. *See id.* at 3-4. Thus, with the exception of basic information, which generally must be released, the district attorney's office may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.²

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. Upon review, we find you have failed to demonstrate any portion of the basic information is highly intimate or embarrassing and not of legitimate public interest. Therefore, the district attorney's office may not withhold any of the basic information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure 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. *See* Gov't Code § 552.130. Upon review, we find no portion of the court-filed document to be subject to section 552.130 of the Government Code. Therefore, the district attorney's office may not withhold any portion of the court-filed document under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, the district attorney's office must release the court-filed document, which we marked, pursuant to section 552.022(a)(17) of the Government Code. With the exception of basic information, which also must be released, the district attorney's office may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) 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.

² As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining arguments against disclosure of this information, except to note basic information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle* is generally not excepted from public disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 597 (1991). In addition, we do not address the applicability of section 1701.661(a) of the Occupations Code to the requested video recordings. *See generally* Occ. Code § 1701.661(a), (e).

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,

Kimbell Kesling
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KK/jxd

Ref: ID# 938402

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)