



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 24, 2022

Ms. Tiffany Bangs
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County
1019 Congress Street, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002-1700

OR2022-08547

Dear Ms. Bangs:

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# 937601 (C.A. File No. 21PIA1018).

The Harris County Public Health Services (the "county") received a request for information pertaining to a specified death. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

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. This section encompasses section 81.046 of the Health and Safety Code, which provides, in pertinent part:

- (a) Reports, records, and information received from any source, including from a federal agency or from another state, furnished to a public health district, a health authority, a local health department, or the [Texas Department of State Health Services] that relate to cases or suspected cases of diseases or health conditions are confidential and may be used only for the purposes of this chapter.
- (b) Reports, records, and information relating to cases or suspected cases of diseases or health conditions are not public information under [the Act], and may not be released or made public on subpoena or otherwise except as provided by Subsections (c), (c-1), (d), and (f).

Health & Safety Code § 81.046(a), (b). In Open Records Decision No. 577 (1990), this office concluded any information acquired or created during an investigation under chapter 81 of the Health and Safety Code is confidential and may not be released unless an exception in the statute applies. *See id.* § 81.046(b)-(d), (f); ORD 577. You state the information at issue relates to the investigation of a case or suspected case of a contagious disease; thus, section 81.046 governs the release of the information at issue. You state the release provisions of section 81.046 are not applicable. Accordingly, the county must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 81.046(b) of the Health and Safety Code.¹

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,

Chase D. Young
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CDY/jxd

Ref: ID# 937601

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

¹ As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining argument against disclosure of this information.