



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 31, 2022

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

OR2022-09485

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# 939807 (County Attorney ID# 0189).

The Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for all reports involving a named individual, including information related to a specified incident. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, 552.130, 552.136, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, we note some of the submitted information is not responsive to the present request because it does not involve the named individual. This ruling does not address the public availability of the non-responsive information, which we have marked, and the sheriff's office need not release it in response to this request.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your arguments against disclosure of this information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov’t Code § 552.101. This section encompasses 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. This office has found a compilation of an individual’s criminal history is highly embarrassing information, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person. *Cf. United States Dep’t of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (finding significant privacy interest in compilation of individual’s criminal history by recognizing distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of criminal history information). Furthermore, we find a compilation of a private citizen’s criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern to the public. However, information that refers to an individual solely as a victim, witness, or involved person is not part of a compilation of the individual’s criminal history and may not be withheld under section 552.101 on that basis.

The present request, in part, seeks all reports pertaining to a named individual. This aspect of the request requires the sheriff’s office to compile unspecified law enforcement records concerning the named individual. We find this request for unspecified law enforcement records implicates the named individual’s right to privacy. Therefore, to the extent the sheriff’s office maintains unspecified law enforcement records depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the sheriff’s office must generally withhold any such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. However, information that refers to an individual solely as a victim, witness, or involved person is not part of a compilation of the individual’s criminal history and may not be withheld under section 552.101 on that basis. We note you have submitted information that does not list the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant. This information does not constitute part of a criminal history compilation of the named individual and may not be withheld on that basis. Additionally, we note the requestor also seeks information pertaining to a specified incident. Because the requestor specifically asks for this information, it is not part of a compilation of the individual’s criminal history. Thus, this information is not confidential under common-law privacy as a compilation of criminal history, and the sheriff’s office may not withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis. Therefore, we will address your arguments against disclosure of this information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 261.201(a) of the Family Code, which provides as follows:

[T]he following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under [the Act], and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

(1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and

(2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). Upon review, we find the information related to incident report numbers 21-36579, 21-36580, 21-42558, and 21-47987 was used or developed in investigations under chapter 261. *See id.* §§ 101.003(a) (defining “child” for purposes of section 261.201), 261.001(1) (defining “abuse” for purposes of section 261.201). Thus, the information is within the scope of section 261.201 of the Family Code. You do not indicate the sheriff’s office has adopted a rule that governs the release of this type of information. Therefore, we assume no such rule exists. Therefore, the information related to incident report numbers 21-36579, 21-36580, 21-42558, and 21-47987 is generally confidential under section 261.201(a) of the Family Code.<sup>3</sup> *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (predecessor statute).

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). You state the remaining information you have indicated pertains to pending criminal investigations or prosecutions. Based on 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 information at issue.

Section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information concerning an investigation that did not result in conviction or deferred adjudication. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.108(a)(2). A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(2) must demonstrate the requested information relates to a criminal investigation that has concluded in a final result other than a conviction or deferred adjudication. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A) (governmental body must provide comments explaining why exceptions raised should apply to information requested). You state the remaining information relates to closed criminal investigations that did not result in convictions or deferred adjudications. Based on this representation and our review, we agree section 552.108(a)(2) is applicable to the remaining information.

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<sup>3</sup> As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

However, we note section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. *Id.* § 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 be basic information). Accordingly, with the exception of basic information, the sheriff's office may generally withhold the remaining information you have indicated under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code and may generally withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code.<sup>4</sup>

However, the requestor is a representative of the Rosenberg Housing Authority (the "housing authority"). The Texas Department of Public Safety ("DPS") is required to provide criminal history record information ("CHRI") to a noncriminal justice agency that is authorized to receive CHRI pursuant to a federal statute, executive order or state statute. *See id.* § 411.083(b)(2). In Open Records Decision No. 655 (1997), this office concluded a local housing authority is a noncriminal justice agency authorized by federal statute to receive CHRI. *See* ORD 655 at 4. The federal Housing Opportunity Program Extension Act of 1996 authorizes housing authorities to obtain criminal records of applicants and tenants. Section 1437d(q)(1)(A) of title 42 of the United States Code provides "the National Crime Information Center, police departments, and other law enforcement agencies shall, upon request, provide information to public housing agencies regarding the criminal conviction records of adult applicants for, or tenants of, public housing for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement, and eviction." 42 U.S.C. § 1437d(q)(1)(A). Pursuant to section 411.087 of the Government Code, an agency that is entitled to obtain CHRI from DPS is also authorized to "obtain from any other criminal justice agency in this state [CHRI] maintained by that [agency]." Gov't Code § 411.087(a)(2). Thus, a housing authority is also authorized to obtain CHRI from a local criminal justice agency such as the sheriff's office. *See* ORD 655 at 4; *see also* Gov't Code §§ 411.083(b)(2), .087(a). CHRI consists of "information collected about a person by a criminal justice agency that consists of identifiable descriptions and notations of arrests, detentions, indictments, informations, and other formal criminal charges and their dispositions." *Id.* § 411.082(2). Federal law limits the purposes for which a public housing authority may request CHRI. Federal law provides that (1) public housing agencies may receive CHRI for adult applicants for public housing or for adult tenants of public housing, and (2) CHRI may only be used for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement, and eviction. 42 U.S.C. § 1437d(q)(1)(A). Section 1437d(q)(1)(A) states a housing authority shall be provided access to the CHRI "[n]otwithstanding any other provision of law." *Id.* Based on this language, we find section 1437d(q)(1)(A) prevails over sections 58.008 and 261.201 of the Family Code, section 552.108 of the Government Code, and common-law privacy. *Cf. Equal Employment Opportunity Comm'n v. City of Orange, Texas*, 905 F. Supp. 381, 382 (E.D. Tex. 1995) (federal law prevails over inconsistent provision of state law); *Collins v. Tex Mall, L.P.*, 297 S. W.3d 409, 415 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2009, no pet.) (statutory provision controls and preempts common law only when statute directly conflicts with common-law principle); *CenterPoint Energy Houston Elec. LLC v. Harris*

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<sup>4</sup> As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

*County Toll Rd. Auth.*, 436 F.3d 541, 544 (5th Cir. 2006) (common law controls only where there is no conflicting or controlling statutory law).

The requestor does not indicate whether the requested information will be used for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement, or eviction. Thus, we must rule conditionally. If you determine the submitted information will be used for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement, or eviction, then the sheriff's office must release any CHRI of applicants or tenants of public housing in accordance with section 1437d(q)(1) of chapter 42 of the United States Code. *See also* 24 C.F.R. § 5.903 (describing public housing authorities' access to criminal records). However, if you determine the information will not be used for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement, or eviction, then the sheriff's office must not release CHRI.

In summary, to the extent the sheriff's office maintains unspecified law enforcement records depicting the named individual as a suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the sheriff's office must withhold any such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common law privacy. The sheriff's office must withhold the information related to incident report numbers 21-36579, 21-36580, 21-42558, and 21-47987 is generally confidential section 261.201(a) of the Family Code. With the exception of basic information, which must be released, the sheriff's office may withhold the remaining information you have indicated under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code and may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code. However, if you determine the submitted information will be used for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement, or eviction, then the sheriff's office must release any CHRI of applicants or tenants of public housing to this requestor in accordance with section 1437d(q)(1) of chapter 42 of the United States 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.

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,

Tim Neal  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

TN/jm

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Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)