



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

April 27, 2022

Ms. Tiffany Bangs
Assistant General Counsel
Harris County Attorney's Office
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2022-12051

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# 943800 (ORR# 22PIA0194).

The Harris County Public Health Services (the "county") received a request for information pertaining to dog owners. The county claims some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exception and reviewed the submitted information.

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 exception encompasses section 826.0311 of the Health and Safety Code, which states, in part, the following:

- (a) Information that is contained in a municipal or county registry of dogs and cats under Section 826.031 that identifies or tends to identify the owner or an address, telephone number, or other personally identifying information of the owner of the registered dog or cat is confidential and not subject to disclosure under [the Act]. The information contained in the registry may not include the social security number or the driver's license number of the owner of the registered animal.
- (b) The information may be disclosed only to a governmental entity or a person that, under a contract with a governmental entity, provides animal control services or animal registration services for the governmental entity

for purposes related to the protection of public health and safety. A governmental entity or person that receives the information must maintain the confidentiality of the information, may not disclose the information under [the Act], and may not use the information for a purpose that does not directly relate to the protection of public health and safety.

Health & Safety Code § 826.0311(a), (b). Section 826.0311 applies only to the actual pet registry; it does not apply to the contents of other records, even though those documents may contain the same information as the pet registry. *See* Open Records Decision No. 658 at 4 (1998) (statutory confidentiality provision must be express, and confidentiality requirement will not be implied from statutory structure). The county states the information is maintained in its pet registry. Based on this representation, we find the city must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 826.0311(a) of the Health and Safety Code. However, section 826.0311(a) is not applicable to the remaining information and the county may not withhold it on that ground. Thus, the county 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,

James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/mo

Ref: ID# 943800

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)