



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 13, 2022

Ms. Josi Diaz
Assistant City Attorney
City of Dallas
1400 Botham Jean Boulevard
Dallas, Texas 75215

OR2022-20146

Dear Ms. Diaz:

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# 958592 (ORR Nos. D006262 and D008539).

The Dallas Police Department (the "department") received two requests from different requestors for information related to a specified incident. We understand the department will redact social security numbers pursuant to section 552.147(b) of the Government Code.¹ In addition, we understand the department does not possess some of the requested information.² You claim some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.130 of the Government Code.³ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.⁴

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

² The Act does not require a governmental body to create or release information that did not exist when a request for information was received. *See Econ. Opportunities Dev. Corp. v. Bustamante*, 562 S.W.2d 266, 267-68 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1978, writ dismissed); Open Records Decision Nos. 605 at 2 (1992), 563 at 8 (1990), 555 at 1-2 (1990), 452 at 3 (1986), 362 at 2 (1983).

³ Although you do not cite to sections 552.101 and 552.130 your brief to this office, we understand you to raise these sections based on your markings.

⁴ 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 that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

Initially, we note, and you acknowledge, the department failed to comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b), (e). Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless there is a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342, 350 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.3d 379, 381 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ). The need of a governmental body, other than the governmental body that failed to timely seek an open records decision, to withhold information under section 552.108 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason sufficient to overcome the presumption of openness. *See* Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991). Because you inform us, and provide documentation showing, the Dallas County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney's office") objects to the release of the information at issue, we will consider whether the department may withhold the information at issue under section 552.108 of the Government Code on behalf of the district attorney's office. In addition, as sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code can provide compelling reasons to overcome the presumption of openness, we will address your arguments under these exceptions against release of the submitted information.

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). Section 552.108 may be invoked by any proper custodian of information relating to a pending investigation or prosecution of criminal conduct. *See* Open Records Decision No. 474 at 4-5 (1987). Where a governmental body has custody of information relating to a pending case of another law enforcement agency, the custodian of records may withhold the information if it provides this office with a demonstration the information relates to a pending criminal case and representation from the law enforcement agency that it wishes to have the information withheld. The district attorney's office objects to the release of the information at issue because it relates to a pending criminal investigation, and release of the information would interfere with the investigation and prosecution of the case. 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 information you marked.

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 be basic information). We note basic information includes, among other items, the arrestee's address. See ORD 127 at 3-4. Thus, with the exception of basic information, which must be released, the department may withhold the information you marked under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code on behalf of the district attorney's office.

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. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). Under the doctrine of common-law privacy, an individual has a right to be free from the publicizing of private affairs in which the public has no legitimate concern. *Id.* at 682. The Third Court of Appeals has concluded public citizens' dates of birth are protected by common-law privacy pursuant to section 552.101. See *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 right to privacy is a personal right that lapses at death and the common-law right to privacy does not encompass information that relates only to a deceased individual. *Moore v. Charles B. Pierce Film Enters., Inc.*, 589 S.W.2d 489, 491 (Tex. Civ. App.—Texarkana 1979, writ ref'd n.r.e.); see also *Justice v. Belo Broadcasting Corp.*, 472 F. Supp. 145, 147 (N.D. Tex. 1979) ("action for invasion of privacy can be maintained only by a living individual whose privacy is invaded" (quoting RESTATEMENT (SECOND) OF TORTS § 6251 (1977)); Attorney General Opinions JM-229 (1984) ("the right of privacy lapses upon death"), H-917 (1976) ("We are . . . of the opinion that the Texas courts would follow the almost uniform rule of other jurisdictions that the right of privacy lapses upon death"). Thus, information pertaining to a deceased individual may not be withheld on common-law privacy grounds. Accordingly, the department must withhold all living public citizens' dates of birth in the remaining information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code provides information relating to a motor vehicle operator's or 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(a). Upon review, we find the department must withhold the motor vehicle record information you marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, with the exception of basic information, which must be released, the department may withhold the information you marked under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code on behalf of the district attorney's office. The department must withhold all living public citizens' dates of birth in the remaining information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. The department must withhold the motor vehicle record information you marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The department 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,

Timothy Neal
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

TN/be

Ref: ID# 958592

Enc. Submitted documents

c: 2 Requestors
(w/o enclosures)