



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 18, 2022

Ms. Kristy Teague
City Secretary and Officer for Public Information
City of Rockwall
385 South Goliad Street
Rockwall, Texas 75087

OR2022-20712

Dear Ms. Teague:

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# 960212 (ORR No. W015630-050622).

The City of Rockwall (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to specified complaints. You claim some of 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 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 information protected by the common-law informer's privilege, which has long been recognized by Texas courts. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969); *Hawthorne v. State*, 10 S.W.2d 724, 725 (Tex. Crim. App. 1928). The privilege protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law enforcement authority, provided the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1988), 208 at 1-2 (1978). The privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar law-enforcement agencies, as well as those who report violations of statutes with civil or criminal penalties to "administrative officials having a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres." Open Records Decision No. 279 at 2 (1981) (citing 8 John H. Wigmore, *Evidence in Trials at Common Law*, § 2374, at 767 (J. McNaughton rev. ed. 1961)). The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at (1990), 515 at 4-5. The privilege excepts the

informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect that informer's identity. Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990). We note the privilege is not intended to protect the identities of public officials and employees who have a duty to report violations of the law. Because a public employee acts within the scope of his employment when filing a complaint, the informer's privilege does not protect the public employee's identity. *Cf. United States v. St. Regis Paper Co.*, 328 F.Supp. 600, 665 (W.D. Wis. 1971) (concluding public officer may not claim informer's reward for service if it is his or her official duty to perform).

You state the submitted information identifies a complainant who reported possible violations of section 34-31 of the city's Code of Ordinances to a staff member of the city's Code Enforcement Department (the "department"). We understand the department is responsible for enforcing the relevant portions of the city code. You also state violation of the relevant city ordinance is punishable by a fine. Based upon your representations and our review, we conclude the city has demonstrated the applicability of the common-law informer's privilege to the information at issue. Thus, the city may withhold the information you indicated under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. The city 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,

Kimbell Kesling
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KK/jxd

Ref: ID# 960212

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)