



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 15, 2022

Ms. Holly A. Sherman
Counsel for the Santa Fe Independent School District
Karczewski, Bradshaw, Spalding, Nichols, Lamp & Langlois
3700 Buffalo Speedway, Suite 560
Houston, Texas 77098

OR2022-24253

Dear Ms. Sherman:

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# 966011.

The Santa Fe Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You state you will withhold student-identifying information pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), section 1232g of title 20 of the United States Code.¹ You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information. We have also received and considered comments from the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

Initially, we note you seek to withhold the submitted information pursuant to article 39.14 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. We note, however, article 39.14 governs the discovery

¹ The United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office (the "DOE") has informed this office FERPA does not permit state and local educational authorities to disclose to this office, without parental or an adult student's consent, unredacted, personally identifiable information contained in education records for the purpose of our review in the open records ruling process under the Act. The DOE has determined FERPA determinations must be made by the educational authority in possession of the educational records. We have posted a copy of the letter from the DOE on the Attorney General's website at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/files/divisions/open-government/20060725-USDOE-FERPA.pdf>

of information and testimony of witnesses in criminal proceedings. *See* Crim. Proc. Code art. 39.14. Article 39.14 does not expressly make information confidential for purposes of the Act. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 658 at 4 (1998) (statutory confidentiality under section 552.101 must be express, and confidentiality requirement will not be implied from statutory structure), 478 at 2 (1978) (statutory confidentiality requires express language making certain information confidential or stating that information shall not be released to public); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 575 at 2 (1990) (explicitly stating discovery privileges are not covered by statutory predecessor to section 552.101). Therefore, we conclude the district may not withhold any portion of the submitted information under article 39.14 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information concerning an investigation that concluded in a result other than conviction or deferred adjudication. Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(2). A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(2) must demonstrate the information at issue relates to a criminal investigation that has concluded in a final result other than conviction or deferred adjudication. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(2), .301(e)(1)(A). Where a governmental body has custody of information relating to a case of a law enforcement agency, the custodian of the records may withhold the information if it provides this office with a demonstration that the information relates to the case and a representation from the law enforcement agency that it wishes to have the information withheld. The Galveston County Criminal District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney's office") objects to the release of the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(2) because it pertains to a criminal investigation it conducted that concluded in a result other than conviction or deferred adjudication. Therefore, we agree section 552.108(a)(2) is applicable to the submitted information. Thus, the district may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code on behalf of the district attorney's office.²

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.

² As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining arguments of the district attorney's office against disclosure of the submitted information. In addition, we note the requestor has a right of access to the information at issue pursuant to section 261.201(k) of the Family Code. *See* Fam. Code § 261.201(k) (parent of child victim of abuse or neglect who is not suspected of abuse or neglect has right of access to information otherwise confidential under section 261.201(a) of the Family Code), (l)(2) (providing any information excepted from required disclosure under the Act or other law must be withheld from disclosure). If the district receives another request for this information from a different requestor, the district must again seek a ruling from this office. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302; Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001).

Sincerely,

Kimbell Kesling
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KK/mo

Ref: ID# 966011

c: Requestor