



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 21, 2022

Ms. Alicia K. Kreh
Counsel for the City of Weatherford
Taylor, Olson, Adkins, Sralla & Elam, L.L.P.
6000 Western Place, Suite 200
Fort Worth, Texas 76107

OR2022-32566

Dear Ms. Kreh:

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# 979364 (Ref. No. W003677).

The City of Weatherford (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified complaint. The city states it will redact information pursuant to Open Records Decision 684 (2009).¹ The city 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 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

¹ Open Records Decision No. 684 is a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold certain categories of information without the necessity of requesting an attorney general opinion.

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 2 (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).

The city states portions of the submitted information identify a complainant who reported possible violations of the city’s code of ordinances. The city informs us the violations carry civil and criminal penalties. The city does not indicate, nor does it appear, the subject of the complaint knows the identity of the reporting party. Therefore, based on these representations and our review, we conclude the city may withhold the information it marked 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,

Alexandra C. Burks
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ACB/pt

Ref: ID# 979364

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)