



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 8, 2022

Ms. Shea Smith
Assistant City Attorney
City of Sugar Land
2700 Town Center Boulevard North
Sugar Land, Texas 77479-0110

OR2022-34897

Dear Ms. Smith:

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# 983481 (ORR# W014988).

The City of Sugar Land (the "city") received a request for specified food safety inspection reports. The city states it has released some of the requested information, but claims 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 representative sample of information.¹

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses section 81.046 of the Health and Safety Code, which provides, in part, the following:

- (a) Reports, records, and information received from any source, including from a federal agency or from another state, furnished to a public health district, a health authority, a local health department, or the [Texas Department of State Health Services] that relate to cases or suspected cases of diseases or health conditions are confidential and may be used only for the purposes of this chapter.

¹ 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 those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

(b) Reports, records, and information relating to cases or suspected cases of diseases or health conditions are not public information under [the Act], and may not be released or made public on subpoena or otherwise except as provided by:

(1) Subsections (c), (c-1), (d), and (f); and

(2) Section 181.060.

Health & Safety Code § 81.046(a)-(b). In Open Records Decision No. 577 (1990), this office concluded any information acquired or created during an investigation under chapter 81 of the Health and Safety Code is confidential and may not be released unless an exception in the statute applies. *See* ORD 577; *see also* Health & Safety Code § 81.046(b)-(d), (f). The city informs us the submitted information pertains to investigations of suspected cases of foodborne illness by the Food Inspection Division of the city's Environmental & Neighborhood Services Department. Based on these representations and our review, we find section 81.046 governs the release of the information at issue. The release provisions of section 81.046 do not appear to be applicable. Accordingly, the city must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 81.046(b) of the Health and Safety Code.

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/pt

Ref: ID# 983481

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)