



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 17, 2022

Ms. Kaitlyn L. Williams  
Assistant County Attorney  
Harris County  
4800 Fournace Place, 6th Floor East  
Bellaire, Texas 77401

OR2022-35891

Dear Ms. Williams:

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# 985813 (ORR# 22HSP0780).

The Hays County Hospital District d/b/a Harris Health System (the "system") received a request for information pertaining to a named employee. The system 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 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 section encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information that is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person and (2) not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both prongs of this test must be satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. Types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court are delineated in the *Industrial Foundation* decision. *Id.* at 683.

In *Morales v. Ellen*, 840 S.W.2d 519 (Tex. App.—El Paso 1992, writ denied), the court addressed the applicability of the common-law privacy doctrine to files of an investigation of allegations of sexual harassment. The investigation files in the *Ellen* decision contained individual witness statements, an affidavit by the individual accused of the misconduct responding to the allegations, and conclusions of the board of inquiry that conducted the

investigation. *Id.* at 525. The court ordered the release of the affidavit of the person under investigation and the conclusions of the board of inquiry, stating the public's interest was sufficiently served by the disclosure of such documents. *Id.* In concluding, the *Ellen* court held "the public did not possess a legitimate interest in the identities of the individual witnesses, nor the details of their personal statements beyond what is contained in the documents that have been ordered released." *Id.* Thus, if there is an adequate summary of an investigation of alleged sexual harassment, the investigation summary must be released under the *Ellen* decision, but the identities of the victims and witnesses of the alleged sexual harassment must be redacted, and their detailed statements must be withheld from disclosure. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 393 (1983), 339 (1982). However, common-law privacy does not protect information about a public employee's alleged misconduct on the job or complaints made about a public employee's job performance. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 438 (1986), 405 (1983), 230 (1979), 219 (1978).

The submitted information relates to an investigation into alleged sexual harassment. Upon review, we find the submitted information does not contain an adequate summary of the investigation. However, the information contains the identity of the sexual harassment victim, which we have marked. Accordingly, we conclude the system must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law right to privacy and the holding in *Ellen*. The remaining information does not constitute highly intimate or embarrassing information of no legitimate public interest. Thus, the system may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy and the holding in *Ellen*. Therefore, the system 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,

James L. Coggeshall  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JLC/jxd

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Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)