



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 7, 2022

Ms. Jodie G. McGuire
Records Clerk
Hood County Sheriff's Office
400 Deputy Larry Miller Drive
Granbury, Texas 76048

OR2022-37986

Dear Ms. McGuire:

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# 988467 (ORR# R22-00821).

The Hood County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for the identity of the person who filed a specified complaint. The sheriff's office claims some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception the sheriff's office claims 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 the common-law informer's privilege, which Texas courts have long recognized. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969). The informer's privilege protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority. *See Open Records Decision No. 208 at 1-2 (1978)*. The informer's 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 1-2 (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 (1988)*. However, witnesses who provide information in the course of an investigation but do not make a report of the violation are not informants for the purposes of claiming the informer's privilege. 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 informer's privilege does not apply where the informant's identity is known to the individual who is the subject of the complaint. *See* ORD 208 at 1-2.

The sheriff's office states portions of the submitted information identify a complainant who reported violations of law to the sheriff's office. Based upon the sheriff's office's representations and our review, we conclude the sheriff's office has demonstrated the applicability of the common-law informer's privilege to some of the information at issue. Therefore, the sheriff's office may withhold the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the complainants under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. However, we find the remaining information the sheriff's office marked does not identify an individual who reported a criminal violation to the sheriff's office for purposes of the informer's privilege. Accordingly, the sheriff's office may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 on that basis. The sheriff's office 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# 988467

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)