

Juvenile Law Case Summaries

By
Robert O. Dawson
Bryant Smith Chair in Law
University of Texas School of Law

[2001 Case Summaries](#) [2000 Case Summaries](#) [1999 Case Summaries](#)

Incident reports of minor traffic accidents involving juveniles are not excepted from disclosure under the Public Information Act [OR2001-0160] (01-4-05).

On January 16, 2001, the Attorney General ruled in a Public Information Act request that police incident reports of minor traffic accidents involving juveniles are not exempt from disclosure by the juvenile records exception to the Public Information Act.

¶ 01-4-05. Attorney General Opinion No. OR2001-0160, 2001 WL 995576 (1/16/01) [*Texas Juvenile Law* (5th Edition 2000)].

Mr. G. Chadwick Weaver
First Assistant City Attorney
City of Midland
P.O. Box 1152
Midland, Texas 79702-1152

Dear Mr. Weaver:

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# 143247.

The City of Midland (the "city") received a request for criminal records pertaining to a particular individual. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This exception encompasses the common law right of privacy. To be protected from public disclosure by the common law right of privacy under section 552.101, the information must meet the criteria set out in *Industrial Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668 (Tex. 1976), cert. denied, 430 U.S. 931 (1977). In *Industrial Foundation*, the Texas Supreme Court stated that information is excepted from disclosure if (1) the information contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the release of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person and (2) the information is not of legitimate concern to the public. 540 S.W.2d at 685. Where an individual's criminal history information has been compiled by a governmental entity, the information takes on a character that implicates the individual's right to privacy. See *United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749 (1989). In this instance, the requestor asks for all criminal record information concerning a certain individual. Therefore, in those records where the named individual is identified as a suspect, we conclude that the individual's right to privacy has been implicated and that you must withhold those records from disclosure. You have submitted two reports where we cannot tell whether the named individual is a suspect. Therefore, we will address your claimed exceptions as to those reports.

You claim that requested reports are confidential under section 58.007 of the Family Code in conjunction with section 552.101 of the Act. Section 58.007 makes certain juvenile law enforcement records confidential. Family Code section 51.04(a) states that the Juvenile Justice Code, Title 3 of the Family Code, "covers the proceedings in all cases involving the delinquent conduct or conduct indicating the need for supervision engaged in by a person who

was a child within the meaning of [Title 3] at the time he engaged in the conduct." Thus, section 58.007 deems confidential law enforcement records from all cases involving a child engaging in delinquent conduct or conduct indicating the need for supervision. Here, the records at issue are incident reports of minor traffic accidents and not the type of records that section 58.007 covers. Therefore, you may not withhold the records under section 58.007 of the Family Code in conjunction with section 552.101 of the Act.

You also claim that one of the reports in Exhibit B is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108(a)(2). Section 552.108(a)(2) provides that "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime is excepted from [required public disclosure] if... it is information that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime only in relation to an investigation that did not result in conviction or deferred adjudication [.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(2). A governmental body that claims an exception to disclosure under section 552.108 must sufficiently explain, if the responsive information does not do so on its face, how and why section 552.108 is applicable. See *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977); *Open Records Decision No. 434 at 2-3 (1986)*.

You inform us that the reported incident in Exhibit B concerns a closed case. You do not, however, inform us to which of the two reports in Exhibit B you are referring. You also inform us that four out of the five people mentioned in the incident report did not have citations that resulted in a conviction or a deferred adjudication. Because the first incident report only concerns two people, and the second report concerns more than five people, we believe that you intended your claim for an exception under 552.108(a)(2) to apply to the second report. Since you have not raised any other exceptions for disclosure for the first report, we conclude that it must be released, but only if it is not protected under common law privacy, as explained above. As for the second report, based on your representation that it identifies suspects who did not have citations that resulted in a conviction or a deferred adjudication, we conclude that you may withhold the second report from disclosure under section 552.108(a)(2).

However, section 552.108 is inapplicable to basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). We believe such basic information refers to basic "front page" information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle Publishing Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.--Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, you may withhold the second report from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(2).

To summarize, none of the submitted documents are protected from disclosure under section 58.007 of the Family Code. If the named individual is identified as the suspect of a crime in either of the submitted reports, you must withhold that report under common law privacy in conjunction with section 552.101. If the named individual is not a suspect in the second report, we conclude that you may withhold the second report, with the exception of basic "front page" information, under section 552.108(a)(2). Because you do not raise any additional exceptions for the first report, we conclude that it must be released unless it is protected by common law privacy.

[Balance of letter dealing with disclosure and appeal procedures is omitted.]

Sincerely,

Stephen P. Agan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

[2001 Case Summaries](#)

[2000 Case Summaries](#)

[1999 Case Summaries](#)