



Office of the Attorney General

State of Texas

January 15, 1997

DAN MORALES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

Mr. Ron Pigott
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Public Safety
P.O. Box 4087
Austin, Texas 78773-0001

OR97-0078

Dear Mr. Pigott:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 102953.

The Texas Department of Public Safety (the "department") received a request for all photographs, reports, statements, videos and field notes concerning a specific automobile accident. You claim that the requested information is excepted from required public disclosure by sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the representative sample of documents that you have submitted.²

¹Although an accident report was not submitted to this office for review, we note that access to accident reports is governed by law other than the Open Records Act. The Seventy-fourth Legislature, without reference to the repeal and codification of V.T.C.S. article 6701d, amended section 47 of article 6701d, V.T.C.S., relating to the disclosure of accident reports. Act of May 27, 1995, 74th Leg., R.S., ch. 894, § 1, 1995 Tex. Sess. Law Serv. 4413, 4414. As amended, section 47(b)(1) places certain restrictions on the general public's access to "all accident reports made as required by [V.T.C.S. art. 6701d] or [V.T.C.S. art. 6701h]." Specifically, section 47(b)(1) provides that a law enforcement agency employing a peace officer who made an accident report is required to release a copy of the report on request *only* to, among others, a person who provides the law enforcement agency with two or more of the following: (1) the date of the accident, (2) the name of any person involved in the accident, or (3) the specific location of the accident. Section 47(a) states that, except as provided by section 47(b), these accident reports are privileged and for the confidential use of the Department of Public Safety and agencies who use the reports for accident prevention purposes.

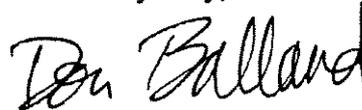
The requestor has provided you with the date and the names of the persons involved in the accident about which he is inquiring. Thus, section 47(b) entitles him to a copy of the accident report if it exists and the department has access to it.

²In reaching our conclusion here, we assume that 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 that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

Section 552.108 excepts from disclosure “[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime,” and “[a]n internal record or notation of a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that is maintained for internal use in matters relating to law enforcement or prosecution.” Gov’t Code § 552.108; see *Holmes v. Morales*, 924 S.W.2d 920 (Tex. 1996). We note, however, that information normally found on the front page of an offense report is generally considered public. *Houston Chronicle Publ’g 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); Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976). Thus, you must release the type of information that is considered to be front page offense report information, even if this information is not actually located on the front page of the offense report. See *Houston Chronicle*, 531 S.W.2d at 187; cf. Open Records Decision No. 597 (1991) (basic information in an offense report generally may not be withheld under section 552.103); see also Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing the types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). The information at issue deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. We therefore conclude that, except for front page offense report information, section 552.108 of the Government Code excepts the requested records from required public disclosure, although you may choose to release all or part of the information at issue that is not otherwise confidential by law. Gov’t Code § 552.007.³

We are resolving this matter with an informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. This ruling is limited to the particular records at issue under the facts presented to us in this request and should not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records. If you questions about this ruling, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,



Don Ballard
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JDB/ch

Ref: ID# 102953

Enclosures: Submitted documents

³Because we are able to make a determination under section 552.108, we do not address your argument under section 552.103.

Mr. Ron Pigott - Page 3

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(w/o enclosures)