



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

March 4, 2003

Lieutenant James Paschall
Brownsville Police Department
600 East Jackson Street
Brownsville, Texas 78520

OR2003-1397

Dear Lt. Paschall:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 177379.

The Brownsville Police Department (the "department") received a written request for all records pertaining to a named individual. You state that the department has located three police reports responsive to the request, one of which you contend is excepted from required disclosure pursuant to sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code.¹

Section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from required public disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if . . . release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime." Section 552.108(a)(1) protects information pertaining to a pending criminal investigation or prosecution because it is presumed that the release of such information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See 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). You state that the submitted records relate to a

¹Because you do not argue that the other two police reports are excepted from required public disclosure, we assume the department has made those reports available to the requestor. If it has not, it must do so at this time. *See Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302; see also Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000)* (noting that if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible under circumstances).

pending criminal investigation being conducted by the department “for eventual submission to the Cameron County District Attorney’s Office for review and possible prosecution.” Based on your representation, we conclude that the department may withhold most of the submitted information pursuant to section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.²

Section 552.108 does not, however, except from required public disclosure “basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime.” Gov’t Code § 552.108(c). The department must therefore release these types of information, including a detailed description of the offense, regardless of whether the basic information is actually contained on the front page of an offense report, in accordance with *Houston Chronicle Publishing Company 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); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976).

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body’s intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

²Because we resolve your request under section 552.108, we need not address the applicability of the other exception you raised.

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Ronald J. Bounds
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RJB/RWP/seg

Ref: ID# 177379

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Nancy Dimas
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(w/o enclosures)