



OFFICE of the ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

March 25, 2003

Mr. T. Scott Petty
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County Attorney's Office
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002-1700

OR2003-2016

Dear Mr. Petty:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 178320.

The Harris County Constable, Precinct 4 (the "constable") received a request for detailed reports concerning two specified case numbers. The submitted documents indicate that the constable does not maintain information pertaining to one of the case numbers. *See Economic Opportunities Dev. Corp. v. Bustamante*, 562 S.W.2d 266 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1978, writ *dism'd w.o.j.*) (governmental body not required to prepare new information to respond to request). You state that you have provided some information concerning the second requested case number but claim that other information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.108(a) excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if: (1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime." Generally, a governmental body claiming section 552.108 must reasonably explain, if the information does not supply the explanation on its face, how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See Gov't Code* §§ 552.108(a)(1), (b)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that the submitted information relates to a pending criminal prosecution. Based on this representation, we conclude that the release of the submitted 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) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases).

However, section 552.108 does not except basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). We believe such basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*, including a detailed description of the offense. See 531 S.W.2d at 186-87. Thus, the constable must release the types of information that are considered to be front page information, even if this information is not actually located on the front page. See Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information made public by *Houston Chronicle*). Although section 552.108(a)(1) authorizes the constable to withhold the remaining information from disclosure, the constable may choose to release all or part of it that is not otherwise confidential by law. See Gov't Code § 552.007.

We note that Texas-issued motor vehicle record information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.130 of the Government Code. This section provides that “[i]nformation is excepted from [required public disclosure] if the information relates to: (1) a motor vehicle operator’s or driver’s license or permit issued by an agency of this state; [or] (2) a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state[.]” However, this exception is rooted in protecting individuals’ privacy. Accordingly, if the requestor has an interest in the vehicle at issue, she has a special right of access to information relating to its license plate number. See Gov’t Code § 552.023(b) (governmental body may not deny access to information to person, or person’s representative, to whom information relates on grounds that information is considered confidential by privacy principles). If the requestor does not have an interest in this vehicle, the constable must withhold the license plate number that we have marked.

In summary, we have marked motor vehicle record information that must be withheld in accordance with section 552.130 unless the requestor has a special right of access to it. Other than basic information, the constable may withhold the remaining submitted information pursuant to section 552.108(a)(1).

Although you request a previous determination for this type of information, we decline to issue one at this time. Accordingly, 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).

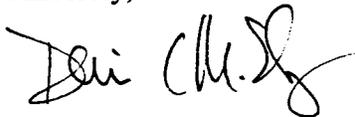
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following 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).

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,



Denis C. McElroy
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DCM/lmt

Ref: ID# 178320

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Sharon Brinson
P.O. Box 11716
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(w/o enclosures)