ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 7, 2004

Ms. Mia Settle-Vinson
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston - Legal Department
P.O. Box 1562
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2004-4605

Dear Ms. Settle-Vinson:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 205481.

The Houston Police Department (the "department") received a request for two specific incident reports. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered your claimed exception to disclosure and have reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.108 of the Government Code, the "law enforcement exception," provides in relevant part as follows:

> (a) Information held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime is excepted from the requirements of 552.021 if: (1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation or prosecution of crime; [or] (2) 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[.]

Generally, a governmental body claiming an exception under section 552.108(a)(1) must reasonably explain 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(b)(1); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that exhibit 3 relates to a criminal investigation that is currently inactive. You state, however, that since the statute of limitations has not run, this case may be reactivated pending additional leads. Based on your representation and our review of the records, we agree that the release of exhibit 3 will

interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publg 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 are present in active cases). Thus, you have shown the applicability of section 552.108(a)(1) to exhibit 3.

You claim that the incident report in exhibit 2 is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108(a)(2). A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(2) must demonstrate that the requested information relates to a criminal investigation that has concluded in a final result other than a conviction or deferred adjudication. You explain that exhibit 2 relates to a criminal investigation that was concluded because there were no suspects and no arrests. Additionally, the statute of limitations for this crime has expired. After reviewing your arguments and the submitted information, we conclude that you have shown the applicability of section 552.108(a)(2) to exhibit 2.

We note, however, that section 552.108 is inapplicable to basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). Since you indicate that the department has released basic information from the two incident reports, we conclude that the department may withhold the remaining information contained in these reports under section 552.108. We note that you have the discretion to release all or part of the remaining information that is not otherwise confidential by law. Gov't Code § 552.007.

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,

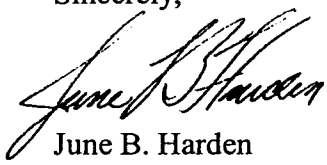
the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge 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,



June B. Harden
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JBH/seg

Ref: ID# 205481

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Yanet Cuddus
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Houston, Texas 77099
(w/o enclosures)