



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 30, 2004

Ms. Julie Joe
Assistant County Attorney
Travis County
P.O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767

OR2004-6420

Dear Ms. Joe:

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# 206199.

The Travis County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for information related to an officer-involved shooting. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.108 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.108(a)(1) excepts from 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[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body that claims an exception to disclosure under section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why section 552.108 is applicable to that information. See Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(A); see also *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977); Open Records Decision No. 434 at 2-3 (1986).

You acknowledge that the submitted information pertains to an internal administrative investigation that was conducted by the sheriff. We note that section 552.108 is generally not applicable to information relating to an administrative investigation that did not result in a criminal investigation or prosecution. See *Morales v. Ellen*, 840 S.W.2d 519, 525-26 (Tex. Civ. App.—El Paso 1992, writ denied) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 not

applicable to internal investigation that did not result in criminal investigation or prosecution); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 350 at 3-4 (1982). In this instance, however, you inform us that the submitted records concern the same subject matter as and directly relate to a criminal investigation conducted by the sheriff. You further inform us that the sheriff's criminal investigation was referred to the Travis County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney") and is currently pending prosecution, and that the district attorney objects to release of the requested information. Thus, you contend that the release of the internal administrative investigation would interfere with the detection, investigation, and prosecution of crime. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted information, we find that the sheriff has adequately demonstrated the applicability of section 552.108(a)(1) to this information. *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). Accordingly, we conclude that the sheriff may withhold the submitted information pursuant to section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. We note, however, that the sheriff maintains the discretion to release all or part of this information that is not otherwise confidential by law. *See* Gov't Code §552.007.¹

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

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address your remaining claim.

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,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/jh

Ref: ID# 206199
Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Lori Kinnard
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(w/o enclosures)