



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 2, 2004

Mr. James L. Dougherty, Jr.
Attorney at Law
5120 Bayard
Houston, Texas 77006

OR2004-6482

Dear Mr. Dougherty:

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# 206203.

The City of West University Place (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for all incidents, call slips and evidence, including photographs and video recordings, related to two specific addresses, from November, 2002 through May, 2004. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.108 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we address the applicability of section 552.101 of the Government Code to the submitted information. Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision and encompasses information that another statute makes confidential. Section 58.007 of the Family Code governs law enforcement records relating to juvenile offenders and provides:

(c) Except as provided by Subsection (d), law enforcement records and files concerning a child and information stored, by electronic means or otherwise, concerning the child from which a record or file could be generated may not be disclosed to the public and shall be:

- (1) if maintained on paper or microfilm, kept separate from adult files and records;
- (2) if maintained electronically in the same computer system as records or files relating to adults, be accessible under controls that are separate and distinct from controls to access electronic data concerning adults; and
- (3) maintained on a local basis only and not sent to a central state or federal depository, except as provided by Subchapter B.

Fam. Code § 58.007(c). For purposes of section 58.007, a child is an individual who is ten years of age or older and under 17 years of age. Fam. Code § 51.02 (defining child for purposes of title 3 of Family Code). In addition, we note that information relating to juvenile crime victims is not made confidential by section 58.007. *See Open Records Decision No. 628 at 6 (1994) (construing predecessor statute).*

Although the submitted report involves a juvenile witness, it does not involve a juvenile suspect or offender. Because a juvenile suspect is not involved, we find that the submitted information is not made confidential under section 58.007 of the Family Code, and it may not be withheld under section 552.101 on that basis.

Next, we address the applicability of section 552.108 to 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 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 offense report and related requested information relates to a pending criminal prosecution. Based upon this representation, we conclude that the release of the offense report and related requested 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).*

We note, however, that information normally found on the front page of an offense report is generally considered public. *See generally Gov’t Code § 552.108(c); 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 types of information that are considered to be front page offense report information, even if this information is not actually located on the

front page of the offense report. Although section 552.108(a)(1) authorizes you to withhold the remaining information from disclosure, you may choose to release all or part of the information at issue that is not otherwise confidential by law. See Gov't Code § 552.007. Because we have been able to resolve this issue under section 552.108, we need not consider your other claimed exceptions.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 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

¹We note that, generally, basic information may not be withheld from public disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. Open Records Decision No. 362 (1983).

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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cary Grace". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Cary Grace
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ECG/seg

Ref: ID# 206203

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Karen Coveler
2708 Centenary
Houston, Texas 77005
(w/o enclosures)