



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

April 14, 2005

Ms. Ashley Fourt
Assistant District Attorney
Tarrant County
401 West Belknap
Fort Worth, Texas 76196-0201

OR2005-03204

Dear Ms. Fourt:

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# 222027.

The Tarrant County District Attorney (the "district attorney") received a request for the criminal records of a specified individual. You claim that the requested information is not subject to the Act. Alternatively, you claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we address your contention that requested information at issue constitutes records of the grand jury. This office has concluded that grand juries are not governmental bodies that are subject to the Act, so that records that are within their actual or constructive possession are not subject to disclosure under the Act. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.003(1)(B), .0035(a); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 513 (1988); 398 at 2 (1983) (grand jury is part of judiciary for purposes of Act). When an individual or entity acts at the direction of the grand jury as its agent, information prepared or collected by the agent is within the grand jury's constructive possession and is not subject to chapter 552. Open Records Decision No. 513 at 3. This office has found that information obtained pursuant to a grand jury subpoena issued in connection with a district attorney's investigation is within the grand jury's constructive possession and is not subject to the Act. *Id.* *See also* Gov't Code § 552.003. However, if the district attorney's investigation began

before any information was submitted to the grand jury, and the grand jury did not formally request or direct all of the district attorney's actions in this investigation, then the information is not deemed to be in the grand jury's constructive possession. The fact that information collected or prepared by the district attorney is submitted to the grand jury, when taken alone, does not mean that the information is in the grand jury's constructive possession when the same information is also held by the district attorney. Open Record Decision No. 513 (1988). You inform us that the submitted information was prepared by the district attorney for presentation to the grand jury. Based on your representation, we find that the district attorney did not prepare or collect the requested information as an agent of the grand jury. *See id.* at 4-5. Therefore, the submitted information is subject to the Act and may be withheld only if an exception under the Act applies.

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 information relates to a pending criminal investigation. Based upon 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 from disclosure 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 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). Thus, with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, you may withhold the requested information from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(1).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

¹ As our ruling on this issue is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.

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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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); *Tex. 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,



Ramsey A. Abarca
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RAA/jev

Ref: ID# 222027

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Patricia Moncrief
c/o Ms. Ashley Fourt
Assistant District Attorney
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(w/o enclosures)