



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 20, 2005

Ms. Shelly O'Brien Yeatts
Assistant District Attorney
Dallas County Criminal District Attorney's Office
Frank Crowley Courts Building
133 North Industrial Boulevard, LB-19
Dallas, Texas 75207-4399

OR2005-09516

Dear Ms. Yeatts:

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# 237664.

The Dallas County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney") received a request for seven categories of information relating to a collision and a subsequent arrest for the offense of driving while intoxicated. You state that the district attorney does not possess information responsive to four items of the request.¹ You claim that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.108, 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the submitted information includes an arrest warrant affidavit. Article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure states that "[t]he arrest warrant, and any affidavit presented to the magistrate in support of the issuance of the warrant, is public information, and beginning immediately when the warrant is executed the magistrate's clerk shall make a copy of the warrant and the affidavit available for public inspection in the clerk's office during normal business hours." Therefore, these documents are made public

¹The Act does not require a governmental body to release information that did not exist when a request for information was received or to prepare new information in response to a request. See *Econ. Opportunities Dev. Corp. v. Bustamante*, 562 S.W.2d 266, 267-68 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1978, writ dismissed); Open Records Decision Nos. 605 at 2 (1992), 452 at 3 (1986), 362 at 2 (1983).

under article 15.26. Exceptions to disclosure under the Act generally do not apply to information that is made public by other statutes, such as article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 623 at 3 (1994), 525 at 3 (1989). Thus, to the extent the arrest warrant affidavit was presented to a magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant, it must be released to the requestor.

You seek to withhold the rest of the information at issue under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Section 552.108(a) of the Government Code 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.” Gov’t Code §§ 552.108(a)(1). 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), .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 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).²

We note, however, that basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime is generally considered public. *See generally* Gov’t Code § 552.108(c); *Houston Chronicle*, 531 S.W.2d 177; Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Thus, you must release the types of information that are considered to be basic information about the incident at issue. Although section 552.108(a)(1) authorizes the district attorney 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.

Finally, we note that the submitted information contains an arrestee’s social security number. Section 552.147 of the Government Code³ provides that “[t]he social security number of a living person is excepted from” required public disclosure under the Act. Therefore, the district attorney must withhold the arrestee’s social security number under section 552.147.⁴

²As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address your remaining arguments.

³Added by Act of May 23, 2005, 79th Leg., R.S., S.B. 1485, § 1, sec. 552.147(a) (to be codified at Tex. Gov’t Code § 552.147).

⁴We note that section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person’s social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act.

In summary, we conclude that: (1) to the extent the arrest warrant affidavit was presented to a magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant, it is public under article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and must be released to the requestor; (2) with the exception of the basic offense and arrest information, which must be released, the district attorney may withhold the remaining submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code; and (3) the arrestee's social security number must be withheld under section 552.147 of the Government Code. As we are able to make these determinations, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.⁵

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, 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); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

⁵We note that basic information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle* is generally not excepted from public disclosure under section 552.103. See Open Records Decision No. 597 (1991).

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 Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,



Brian J. Rogers
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BJR/krl

Ref: ID# 237664

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Aaron A. Herbert
Rad Law Firm
North Dallas Bank Tower
12900 Preston Road, Suite 900
Dallas, Texas 75230-1325
(w/o enclosures)