



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 23, 2006

Mr. Jeff Lopez
Assistant General Counsel
Office of General Counsel
Texas Department of Public Safety
P. O. Box 4087
Austin, Texas 78773-0001

OR2006-00721

Dear Mr. Lopez:

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# 240489.

The Texas Department of Public Safety (the "department") received a request for information related to a particular motor vehicle incident. You state that you have released some information to the requestor. You claim that portions of the requested information are excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.¹

Initially, we note that the submitted documents include a complaint affidavit and affidavits submitted for probable cause determination. Article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure states "[t]he arrest warrant, and any affidavit presented to the magistrate in support of the issuance of the warrant, is public information." Crim. Proc. Code art. 15.26. Article 15.04 provides that "[t]he affidavit made before the magistrate or district or county attorney is called a 'complaint' if it charges the commission of an offense." Crim. Proc. Code art. 15.04. Case law indicates that a complaint can support the issuance of an arrest warrant. See *Janecka v. State*, 739 S.W.2d 813, 822-23 (Tex. Crim. App. 1987); *Villegas v. State*, 791 S.W.2d 226, 235 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi 1990, pet. ref'd); *Borsari v.*

¹Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply not later than the tenth business day after the date of receiving the written request. Gov't Code § 552.301(b). The department received the request for information on October 31, 2005. The department requested a decision from this office on November 14, 2005. Thus, the department requested a decision within the ten business day period mandated by section 552.301(b) of the Government Code.

State, 919 S.W.2d 913, 918 (Tex. App.—Houston [14 Dist.] 1996, pet. ref'd) (discussing well-established principle that complaint in support of arrest warrant need not contain same particularity required of indictment). Therefore, to the extent the submitted complaint affidavit and affidavits submitted for probable cause determination were presented to a magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant, they are public under article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and must be released. Otherwise, these documents are subject to the remainder of this ruling as discussed below.

We now address your claim under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code with respect to the remaining information at issue. 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 requested information relates to a pending criminal case. Based upon this representation, we conclude that the release of this 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*. Thus, with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, the department may withhold the remaining requested information from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(1). We note that the department has the discretion to release all or part of this information that is not otherwise confidential by law. Gov’t Code § 552.007.

In summary, to the extent the submitted complaint affidavit and affidavits submitted for probable cause determination were presented to a magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant, they are public under article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and must be released; otherwise, these documents are subject to the remainder of this ruling. With the exception of basic information, which must be released, the department may withhold the remaining information pursuant to section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

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).

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,



James Forrest
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JF/er

Mr. Jeff Lopez - Page 4

Ref: ID# 240489

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Karen L. Semanek
The Linebaugh Law Firm, PC
1300 Rollingbrook, Suite 603
Baytown, Texas 77521
(w/o enclosures)