



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 9, 2006

Ms. Catherine Zellers
City of Weatherford
P. O. Box 255
Weatherford, Texas 76086

OR2006-06095

Dear Ms. Zellers:

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# 255015.

The City of Weatherford (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to case number 200518776. You claim that portions of the requested information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.108, 552.130, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the submitted information includes a search warrant and supporting affidavit, and the officer's return. Section 552.022 of the Government Code provides in part:

(a) Without limiting the amount or kind of information that is public information under this chapter, the following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure under this chapter unless they are expressly confidential under other law:

...

(17) information that is also contained in the public court record[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(17). Section 552.022(a)(17) makes an executed search warrant and officer's return, which have been filed with a court, expressly public. Therefore, the city may withhold the executed search warrant and officer's return only to the extent the information is made confidential under other law. Although the city raises section 552.108 for this information, this exception is discretionary and thus, does not make information confidential.

See Open Records Decision No. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally). Therefore, the court-filed documents may not be withheld under section 552.108 of the Government Code. As the city raises no further exceptions to the disclosure of this information, it must be released.

The release of a search warrant affidavit is governed by article 18.01 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which provides in part:

(b) No search warrant shall issue for any purpose in this state unless sufficient facts are first presented to satisfy the issuing magistrate that probable cause does in fact exist for its issuance. A sworn affidavit setting forth substantial facts establishing probable cause shall be filed in every instance in which a search warrant is requested. The affidavit is public information if executed, and the magistrate's clerk shall make a copy of the affidavit available for public inspection in the clerk's office during normal business hours.

Crim. Proc. Code art. 18.01(b). This provision makes the search warrant affidavit expressly public. The exceptions found in the Act do not, as a general rule, apply to information that is made public by other statutes. *See* Open Records Decision No. 525 (1989) (statutory predecessor). Therefore, pursuant to article 18.01(b), the city must release the submitted search warrant affidavit.

The submitted information also contains an arrest warrant and supporting affidavit. 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. As previously noted, the exceptions found in the Act do not, as a general rule, apply to information that is made public by other statutes. Therefore, the city must release the arrest warrant and supporting affidavit we have marked pursuant to article 15.26.

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." *Id.* § 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 id.* §§ 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 Exhibits C, D, E, and H 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 city may withhold Exhibits C, D, E, and H from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(1). We note that you have the discretion to release all or part of this information that is not otherwise confidential by law. *See id.* § 552.007.

You assert that some of the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.130 of the Government Code. This section excepts from public disclosure information that relates to "a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state[.]" Gov't Code § 552.130(a)(1). Accordingly, you must withhold the Texas driver's license number we have marked in Exhibit B pursuant to section 552.130 of the Government Code.

Exhibit B also contains a social security number. Section 552.147 of the Government Code provides that "[t]he social security number of a living person is excepted from" required public disclosure under the Act. Therefore, the social security number that we have marked must be withheld under section 552.147.¹

In summary, the executed search warrant must be released under section 552.022 of the Government Code. The search warrant affidavit must be released pursuant to article 18.01 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The arrest warrant and supporting affidavit must be released in accordance with article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Except for basic information, Exhibits C, D, E, and H may be withheld under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. We have marked the information in Exhibit B that must be withheld under sections 552.130 and 552.147 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released to the requestor.

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.

¹We 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.

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,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/krl

Ref: ID# 255015

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Connie Black
710 Gun Barrel
Weatherford, Texas 76085
(w/o enclosures)