ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 22, 2006

Ms. Pam Whitlock
McLennan County Sheriff's Office
219 North 6th Street
Waco, Texas 76701

OR2006-06594

Dear Ms. Whitlock:

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# 256702.

The McLennan County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for a specified offense report. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the submitted information includes an arrest warrant and a complaint. 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[.]" Article 15.04 of the Code of Criminal Procedure 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." 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); *Borsari v. State*, 919 S.W.2d 913, 918 (Tex. App.–Houston [14 Dist.] 1996, pet. ref'd) (complaint in support of arrest warrant need not contain same particularity required of indictment); *Villegas v. State*, 791 S.W.2d 226, 235 (Tex. App.–Corpus Christi 1990, pet. ref'd). The exceptions to disclosure in the Act do not apply to information that is made public by other statutes. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 623 at 3 (1994), 525 at 3 (1989). Therefore, the arrest warrant and complaint, which we have marked, must be released pursuant to article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

You assert that the remaining information is excepted under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. Section 552.108(a)(1) excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime [if] release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime." 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), 552.301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that the remaining information relates to a pending criminal investigation. Based on 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 rej'd n.r.e.*, 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 sheriff may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1).

To conclude, the sheriff must release the marked arrest warrant and complaint pursuant to article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. With the exception of the basic front-page offense and arrest information, the sheriff may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(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, 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. 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,

James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/vh

Ref: ID# 256702

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Julie Moore
P.O. Box 7930
Waco, Texas 76714
(w/o enclosures)