



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 8, 2006

Mr. Trenton C. Nichols
Brown & Hofmeister, L.L.P.
740 East Campbell Road Suite 800
Richardson, Texas 75081

OR2006-08872

Dear Mr. Nichols:

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# 259936.

The Town of Flower Mound (the "town"), which you represent, received a request for information relating to a specified arrest. You state that some of the requested information has been released. You claim that the rest of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and have reviewed the information you submitted.

We first note that the submitted documents include a probable cause affidavit. Article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that "[an] 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 (emphasis added). As a general rule, the exceptions to disclosure found in the Act do not apply to information that other statutes make public. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 623 at 3 (1994), 525 at 3 (1989). The department must release the probable cause affidavit that we have marked under article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure if it was presented to a magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant.

We also note that one of the submitted documents is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022 provides for the required public disclosure of "information that is also contained in a public court record," unless the information is expressly confidential under other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(17). Although you seek

to withhold the information that is subject to section 552.022 under section 552.108 of the Government Code, that section is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See id.* § 552.007; Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.108 subject to waiver). Section 552.108 is not other law that makes information confidential for the purposes of section 552.022(a)(17). Thus, the town may not withhold the document that is subject to section 552.022 under section 552.108. Furthermore, the document in question does not contain any information that is confidential under other law for purposes of section 552.022. Therefore, that document, which we have marked, must be released under section 552.022(a)(17) of the Government Code.

Next, we address your claim under section 552.108 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[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body that claims an exception to disclosure under section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why this exception is applicable to the information at issue. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A); *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that the rest of the submitted information relates to a pending criminal prosecution. Based on your representation, we conclude that section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable in this instance. *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).

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). Section 552.108(c) refers to the basic front-page information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. The town must release basic information, including a detailed description of the offense, even if this information does not literally appear on the front page of an offense or arrest report. *See Houston Chronicle*, 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). The town may withhold the rest of the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

Lastly, we note that under section 552.147 of the Government Code, "[t]he social security number of a living person is excepted from" required public disclosure under the Act.¹ The town must withhold the social security number of the arrested person under section 552.147.

¹We also 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: (1) the town must release the marked probable cause affidavit under article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure if it was presented to a magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant; (2) the town also must release the marked document that is subject to section 552.022(a)(17) of the Government Code; (3) except for the basic information that must be released under section 552.108(c), the town may withhold the rest of the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code; and (4) the town must withhold the arrested person's social security number under section 552.147 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).

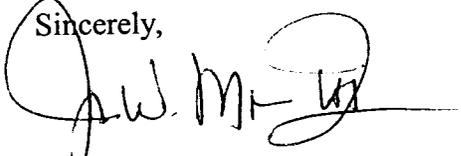
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.W. Morris, III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "W".

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/vh

Ref: ID# 259936

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Robert Blum
709 Winding Bend Circle
Highland Village, Texas 75077
(w/o enclosures)