



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 4, 2009

Mr. Samuel D. Hawk
Assistant City Attorney
Criminal Law and Police Division
City of Dallas
1400 South Lamar
Dallas, Texas 75215

OR2009-17283

Dear Mr. Hawk:

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# 368223 (Dallas Open Records Request No. 2009-9707).

The Dallas Police Department (the "department") received a request for service numbers 324494-W and 324493-W. You claim that portions of the requested information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.108 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.¹

Initially, we address the submitted CR-3 accident report completed pursuant to chapter 550 of the Transportation Code. Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision."² Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information made confidential by other statutes, including chapter 550 of the Transportation Code. *See* Transp. Code § 550.064 (officer's accident report). Section 550.065(b) states that except as

¹We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

²The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

provided by subsection (c), accident reports are privileged and confidential. Section 550.065(c)(4) provides for the release of accident reports to a person who provides two of the following three pieces of information: (1) date of the accident; (2) name of any person involved in the accident; and (3) specific location of the accident. *Id.* § 550.065(c)(4). Under this provision, the Texas Department of Transportation or another governmental entity is required to release a copy of an accident report to a person who provides the agency with two or more pieces of information specified by the statute. *Id.* In this instance, the requestor has not provided two of the three pieces of required information for the submitted accident report. Thus, the department must withhold the accident report, which we have marked, under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 550.065(b).

You claim that some of the remaining submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Section 552.108 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 must reasonably explain how and why section 552.108 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 information you have marked relates to a pending criminal investigation. Based on this representation, we conclude that 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. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref’d n.r.e.*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases).

We note, and you acknowledge, that 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*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88. The department must release basic information, including a detailed description of the offense, even if the information does not literally appear on the front page of an offense or arrest report. *See* Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). Thus, with the exception of basic information, which must be released, the department may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

You have marked information you claim is excepted under section 552.130 of the Government Code. Section 552.130 excepts from disclosure information relating to a Texas motor vehicle driver’s license and registration information. Gov’t Code § 552.130. We note that the purpose of section 552.130 is to protect the privacy interests of individuals. Because the right of privacy lapses at death, Texas motor vehicle record information that pertains to a deceased individual may not be withheld under section 552.130. *See Moore v. Charles B. Pierce Film Enters., Inc.*, 589 S.W.2d 489, 491 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1979, *writ ref’d* (Texas does not recognize relational or derivative right of privacy); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 272 at 1 (1981) (privacy rights lapse upon death). We note the information you

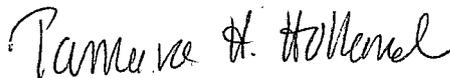
have marked relates to a vehicle that was owned by an individual who is now deceased. There is no indication that any living individual owns an interest in the vehicle. Accordingly, none of the information at issue may be withheld under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, the department must withhold the marked CR-3 accident report under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 550.065(c) of the Transportation Code. With the exception of basic information, the department may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.108 of the Government Code. The remaining submitted information must be released to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Tamara H. Holland
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

THH/jb

Ref: ID# 368223

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)