



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 28, 2015

Ms. Laura Russell
Attorney
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
4200 Smith School Road
Austin, Texas 78744-3291M

OR2015-18010

Dear Mr. Russell:

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# 577836 (TWPD#s 2015-06-R22, 2015-06-R23, and 2015-06-R24).

The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (the "department") received three requests for certain information pertaining to the department's involvement in Operation Strong Safety.¹ You state you are releasing some information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample information.²

Section 552.108(b) excepts from disclosure "[a]n internal record or notation of a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that is maintained for internal use in matters relating to law enforcement or prosecution . . . if (1) release of the internal record or notation would

¹You state the requestor modified one of his requests in response to a cost estimate. *See* Gov't Code § 552.263(e-1) (modified request is considered received on the date the governmental body receives the written modification).

²We assume 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 those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

interfere with law enforcement or prosecution[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.108(b)(1). This section is intended to protect “information which, if released, would permit private citizens to anticipate weaknesses in a police department, avoid detection, jeopardize officer safety, and generally undermine police efforts to effectuate the laws of this State.” *City of Fort Worth v. Cornyn*, 86 S.W.3d 320, 327 (Tex. App.—Austin 2002, no pet.). This office has concluded this provision protects certain kinds of information, the disclosure of which might compromise the security or operations of a law enforcement agency. *See, e.g.*, Open Records Decision Nos. 531 at 3-4 (1989) (detailed guidelines regarding police department’s use of force policy), 456 (198) (information regarding location of off-duty police officers), 413 (1984) (sketch showing security measures for forthcoming execution). However, to claim this aspect of section 552.108 protection a governmental body must meet its burden of explaining how and why release of the information at issue would interfere with law enforcement and crime prevention. Open Records Decision No. 562 at 10 (1990). Further, commonly known policies and techniques may not be withheld under section 552.108. *See, e.g.*, Open Records Decision Nos. 531 at 2-3 (former section 552.108 does not protect Penal Code provisions, common-law rules, and constitutional limitations on use of force), 252 at 3 (1980) (governmental body did not meet burden because it did not indicate why investigative procedures and techniques submitted were any different from those commonly known with law enforcement and crime prevention). To prevail on its claim that section 552.108(b)(1) excepts information from disclosure, a law-enforcement agency must do more than merely make a conclusory assertion that releasing the information would interfere with law enforcement. The determination of whether the release of particular records would interfere with law enforcement is made on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 409 at 2 (1984).

You seek to withhold some of the responsive information under section 552.108(b)(1). You state the information you have marked is created by Operation Strong Safety law enforcement entities and includes confidential information related to time, location, tactics, and personnel used to disrupt criminal activity. You state release of the information at issue would provide criminals with invaluable intelligence and operational information in specialized operations, including border patrol security, and illustrate methods used to detect and respond to criminal activity. You argue release of the information would be detrimental to officer safety and mission success. Upon review, we find the release of the information at issue would interfere with law enforcement. Therefore, the department may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.108(b)(1) of the Government Code.³

You seek to withhold portions of the remaining responsive information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 418.176 of the Texas Homeland Security Act (the “HSA”), chapter 418 of the Government Code. Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information considered

³As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure for this information.

to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov’t Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses information that is made confidential by other statutes, including the HSA. Section 418.176 of the HSA provides in relevant part:

(a) Information is confidential if the information is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental entity for the purpose of preventing, detecting, responding to, or investigating an act of terrorism or related criminal activity and:

(1) relates to the staffing requirements of an emergency response provider, including a law enforcement agency, a fire-fighting agency, or an emergency services agency; [or]

(2) relates to a tactical plan of the provider[.]

Id. § 418.176(a)(1)-(2). The fact that information may generally be related to emergency preparedness does not make the information *per se* confidential under the provisions of the HSA. *See* Open Records Decision No. 649 at 3 (1996) (language of confidentiality provisions controls scope of its protection). As with any confidentiality statute, a governmental body asserting this section must adequately explain how the responsive information falls within the scope of the provision. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.301(e)(1)(A) (governmental body must explain how claimed exception to disclosure applies).

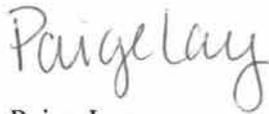
The department states the information at issue relates to strategic operations of the department for the purpose of responding to criminal activity on the border. You explain the information reveals staffing requirements, including peace officer assignments, coverage and locations. Upon review, we find the information you have marked relates to a tactical plan of an emergency response provider and is maintained by or for a governmental entity for the purpose of preventing, detecting, responding to, or investigating an act of terrorism or related criminal activity. Therefore, the department must withhold the information you have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 418.176 of the Government Code.

In summary, the department may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.108(b)(1) of the Government Code. The department must withhold the information you have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 418.176 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paige Lay".

Paige Lay
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PL/bhf

Ref: ID# 577836

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)