



January 30, 2002

Ms. Ruth Reyes
Assistant City Attorney
Office of the City Attorney
City of El Paso
2 Civic Center Plaza
El Paso, Texas 79901

OR2002-0437

Dear Ms. Reyes:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 158108.

The El Paso Police Department (the "department") received a request for a specific offense report. You state that you have released basic information, including a redacted copy of the complaint report, to the requestor. You claim that the supplemental reports and complainants' identities contained in the offense report are excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

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." Generally, a governmental body claiming section 552.108 must reasonably explain, if the information does not supply the explanation on its face, how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See* Gov't Code §§ 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 supplemental reports relate to a pending criminal investigation. Based upon this representation, we conclude that the release of the supplemental reports 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).

We note, however, that information normally found on the front page of an offense report is generally considered public. *See generally* Gov't Code § 552.108(c); *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); Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976). The identity of a complainant is basic information that is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.108. See *Houston Chronicle*, 531 S.W.2d at 186-87; Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976). You state that you have released some of the basic information to the requestor, but that in this instance, you seek to withhold the complainants' identities because you contend "that retaliation may occur if the names of the complainants are released" and that such release "would unduly interfere with law enforcement." You rely on Open Records Decision No. 628 (1994) in withholding the complainants' identities. In Open Records Decision No. 628, this office found that "section 552.108 of the Government Code may in some circumstances except from disclosure the identity of a juvenile crime victim if a law enforcement agency can show how its release will unduly interfere with law enforcement." *Id.* at 3. Since the issuance of Open Records Decision No. 628, the legislature has amended section 552.108. Information that would interfere with law enforcement is now excepted under section 552.108(a)(1). However, section 552.108(c) expressly states that basic information is not excepted under section 552.108. Because the complainants' identities are basic information, the department may not withhold them under section 552.108. Therefore, you must disclose the identities of the complainants.

In summary, the department may withhold the supplemental reports from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(1). However, you must release the identities of the complainants as basic information. Although section 552.108(a)(1) authorizes you to withhold the supplemental reports from disclosure, you may choose to release all or part of the information at issue that is not otherwise confidential by law. See Gov't Code § 552.007.

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, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records

will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, 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); *Tex. 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 Texas Building and Procurement Commission 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,



Yen-Ha Le
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

YHL/DKB/sdk

Ref: ID# 158108

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Lavertis Evans
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(w/o enclosures)