



September 30, 2002

Mr. Richard C. Terrell  
Attorney at Law  
608 East Second  
Alice, Texas 78332

OR2002-5494

Dear Mr. Terrell:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 169970.

The Alice Police Department (the “department”), which you represent, received a request for eight categories of information related to the 1974 murder of a police officer. You state that you will provide the requestor with information responsive to seven categories of the request but claim that the requested witness statement is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information. We have also considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See Gov’t Code § 552.304* (providing for submission of public comments).

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 requested witness statement relates to a pending criminal investigation. Based upon 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 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).

However, the requestor asserts that this statement has previously been released to the media. Section 552.007 of the Government Code provides that if a governmental body voluntarily releases information to any member of the public, the governmental body may not withhold such information from further disclosure unless its public release is expressly prohibited by law. *See* Gov't Code 552.007; Open Records Decision No. 518 at 3 (1989). Section 552.108 is a discretionary exception that may be waived by a governmental body; this exception does not make information confidential. *See* Open Records Decision No. 177 (1977) (governmental body may waive law enforcement exception); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 522 at 4 (1989) (discretionary exceptions in general). Therefore, the department may withhold the submitted witness statement pursuant to section 552.108(a)(1) only if the statement has not been previously released to a member the public. On the other hand, if the department has previously made this statement available, the information must be released since the department does not cite and we are unaware of any law that makes this information confidential.

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).

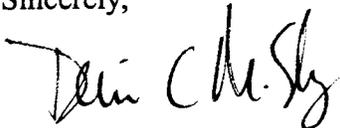
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following 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); *Texas Department of Public 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. 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,



Denis C. McElroy  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

DCM/seg

Ref: ID# 169970

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Dr. Ray Magouirk  
Magouirk & Company Research  
54 Ballerina Circle  
Grove, Oklahoma 74344  
(w/o enclosures)