



November 18, 2002

Ms. Elaine S. Hengen
Assistant City Attorney
City of El Paso
2 Civic Center Plaza
El Paso, Texas 79901-1196

OR2002-6559

Dear Ms. Hengen:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 172345.

The El Paso Police Department (the "department") received five requests from the same requestor for information relating to five specific cases. You state that the department has released some of the requested information. You claim that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the information you submitted.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This exception encompasses information that another statute makes confidential. You assert that the information relating to case number 00-321337 is confidential under section 261.201 of the Family Code. Chapter 261 of the Family Code governs investigations of suspected child abuse or neglect. Section 261.201 provides in relevant part:

(a) The following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

(1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and

(2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). Having reviewed the information relating to case number 00-321337, we agree that the information consists of files, reports, records, communications, and working papers used or developed in an investigation made under chapter 261 of the Family Code. *See also* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (construing predecessor statute). You state that the department has no regulations that would allow the release of this information to the public. We therefore conclude that the information relating to case number 00-321337 is confidential in its entirety under section 261.201 of the Family Code and thus is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code as information made confidential by law.

You claim that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure 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[.]” A governmental body that raises section 552.108 must reasonably explain, if the requested information does not supply an explanation on its face, how and why section 552.108 is applicable to that information. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.301(e)(1)(A); *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977); Open Records Decision No. 434 at 2-3 (1986).

You inform us that the remaining information relates to case numbers 00-361148, 01-010306, 01-011379, and 01-016094. You state that this information pertains to pending prosecutions and that its release would interfere with law enforcement and prosecution. Based on your representations and our review of the information relating to case numbers 00-361148, 01-010306, 01-011379, and 01-016094, we find 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).

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 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 Houston Chronicle*, 531 S.W.2d at 186-187; Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). You indicate that the department has released basic information with regard to case numbers 00-361148, 01-010306, 01-011379,

and 01-016094. We therefore conclude that the department may withhold the remaining information that relates to those four case numbers under section 552.108(a)(1).

In summary, the information relating to case number 00-321337 is excepted from disclosure in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code. The department may withhold the remaining information that relates to case numbers 00-361148, 01-010306, 01-011379, and 01-016094 under section 552.108(a)(1). As we are able to make these determinations, we need not address your claim under section 552.130.

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).

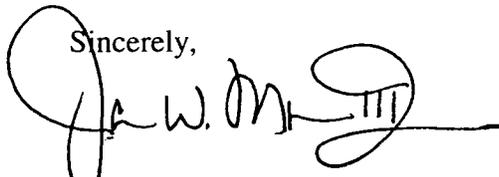
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James W. Morris, III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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

JWM/sdk

Ref: ID# 172345

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Veronica Esqueda
Federal Public Defender's Office
700 E. San Antonio, D-401
El Paso, Texas 79901
(w/o enclosures)