



OFFICE of the ATTORNEY GENERAL  
GREG ABBOTT

March 13, 2003

Mr. Brad Norton  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Austin - Law Department  
P.O. Box 1546  
Austin, Texas 78767-1546

OR2003-1686

Dear Mr. Norton:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 180025.

The Austin Police Department (the "department") received a request for two specific incident reports. You state that you have released one of the requested reports. You claim, however, that the other incident report is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and have reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the submitted information includes records that have been filed with a court. Information filed with a court is generally a matter of public record and may not be withheld from disclosure unless it is confidential under other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(17); *see also Star-Telegram, Inc. v. Walker*, 834 S.W.2d 54, 57 (Tex. 1992) (orig. proceeding) (stating that if documents are part of public record they cannot be withheld under Gov't Code § 552.108). Accordingly, the department must release the submitted court-filed documents. We now address your section 552.108 claim for the remaining submitted information.

Section 552.108 of the Government Code states that information held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime is excepted from required public disclosure "if release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime." Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). You

inform us that the submitted information pertains to an ongoing criminal investigation. We, therefore, 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 [14<sup>th</sup> 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, section 552.108 is inapplicable to basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov’t Code § 552.108(c). We believe such basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. See Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). Thus, with the exception of the court-filed documents and the basic front page offense and arrest information, you may withhold the submitted information from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(1). We note that you have the discretion to release all or part of the remaining information that is not otherwise confidential by law.

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).

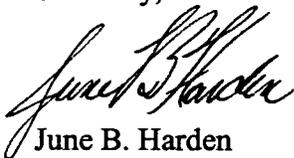
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following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



June B. Harden  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JBH/seg

Ref: ID# 180025

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Dianne Fernandez  
MacInnes, Whigham, Lively & Siefken, L.L.P.  
2104 Nueces Street  
Austin, Texas 78705  
(w/o enclosures)