OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

October 23, 2003

Mr. Brad Norton
Assistant City Attorney
City of Austin
114 West 7th Street
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767-8845

OR2003-7607

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# 192416.

The City of Austin Police Department (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to a specified case. You claim that most of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

First, we note that the submitted information includes a search warrant affidavit. The affidavit to support a search warrant is made public by statute if the search warrant has been executed. *See* Code Crim. Proc art. 18.01(b). Here, the search warrant has been executed; therefore, the department must release the search warrant affidavit.

Second, the submitted information includes a Search Warrant. 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). Section 552.108 is not "other law" that makes court records confidential for purposes of section 552.022. Therefore, the Search Warrant must be released to the requestor if it has been filed with a court. With regard to the remainder of the submitted information, we will address your argument against disclosure.

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 requested information pertains to a pending case. We therefore believe that the release of the information "would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime." *Id.*

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 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). Thus, with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, the court-filed documents and the search warrant affidavit, you may withhold the requested 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. 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,

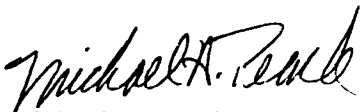
at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

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); *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,



Michael A. Pearle
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MAP/jh

Ref: ID# 192416

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Barbara Jo Teller
144 Knapp Road
Constantia, New York 13044
(w/o enclosures)