



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 18, 2004

Mr. Brad Norton
Assistant City Attorney
City of Austin
P. O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767-8845

OR2004-1202

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# 196388.

The Austin Police Department (the "department") received a request for (1) copies of all incident reports, witness statements, and similar documents "relating to any events surrounding the incident reported in Case # 203-277-1426," and (2) copies of all incident reports, complaints, or other documents evidencing this investigation or any claims made against anyone involved in this incident. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by the common-law right to privacy, which protects information if it is highly intimate or embarrassing such that its release would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and the public has no legitimate interest in it. *Industrial Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668 (Tex. 1976). Where an individual's criminal history information has been compiled by a governmental entity, the information takes on a character that implicates the individual's right to privacy. *See United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749 (1989). However, information that refers to an individual solely as a victim, witness, or involved person is not private under *Reporters Committee* and may not be withheld under section 552.101 on that basis.

In this instance, the requestor asks for “any claims made against anyone involved in this incident.” Thus, this request requires the department to compile the involved individuals’ criminal history, to the extent any such history exists, and thus implicates the involved individuals’ right to privacy. Therefore, to the extent that the department maintains other records in which any of the involved individuals is portrayed as a suspect, defendant, or arrestee, it must withhold such information in its entirety under section 552.101 and the common-law right to privacy.

Next, we address your claim under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code 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.” Generally, a governmental body claiming section 552.108 must reasonably explain 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 incident report numbers 2003-2771426 and 2003-5013552 relate to open investigations. Based upon this representation and our review of the submitted information, we conclude that the release of incident report numbers 2003-2771426 and 2003-5013552 would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime, and therefore, that section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to this information. *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(a)(2) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information concerning an investigation that concluded in a result other than conviction or deferred adjudication. A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(2) must demonstrate that the requested information relates to a criminal investigation that has concluded in a final result other than a conviction or deferred adjudication. You state that the incident report numbers 92 2781054, 94 3671556, 00 0361653, 01 0621626, 01 0490253, 01 4005175, 01 4002605, 01 4854771, 01 1120040, and 02 4685325 relate to criminal investigations that did not result in conviction or deferred adjudication. Based upon these representations and our review, we agree that section 552.108(a)(2) is applicable to incident report numbers 92 2781054, 94 3671556, 00 0361653, 01 0621626, 01 0490253, 01 4005175, 01 4002605, 01 4854771, 01 1120040, and 02 4685325.

We note, however, that 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*. 531 S.W.2d at 185. Thus, with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, you may withhold incident report numbers 2003-2771426, 2003-5013552, 92 2781054, 94 3671556, 00 0361653, 01 0621626, 01 0490253, 01 4005175, 01 4002605, 01 4854771, 01 1120040,

and 02 4685325 from disclosure based on section 552.108. We note that you have the discretion to release all or part of the remaining information in these incident reports that is not otherwise confidential by law. Gov't Code § 552.007.

Finally, we note that a portion of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.130 of the Government Code. Section 552.130 prohibits the release of information that relates to a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state or a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state. See Gov't Code § 552.130. Accordingly, the department must withhold the information we have marked pursuant to section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, we conclude: (1) to the extent that the department maintains other records in which any of the involved individuals is portrayed as a suspect, defendant, or arrestee, it must withhold such information in its entirety under section 552.101 and the common-law right to privacy; (2) with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, the department may withhold incident report numbers 2003-2771426, 2003-5013552, 92 2781054, 94 3671556, 00 0361653, 01 0621626, 01 0490253, 01 4005175, 01 4002605, 01 4854771, 01 1120040, and 02 4685325 from disclosure based on section 552.108; and (3) the department must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.130. The remaining information must be released.

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,



Sarah I. Swanson
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SIS/lmt

Ref: ID# 196388

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Belinda Stephens
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(w/o enclosures)