



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

May 14, 2004

Mr. Jeff Lopez  
Assistant General Counsel  
Texas Department of Public Safety  
P.O. Box 4087  
Austin, Texas 78773

OR2004-3973

Dear Mr. Lopez:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 201582.

The Texas Department of Public Safety (the "department") received a request for information regarding a specified accident involving two named individuals. You indicate that some information will be provided to the requestor. You claim that the remaining 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.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, we note that the submitted information includes an arrest warrant affidavit. The 78th Legislature recently amended article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to add language providing:

The arrest warrant, and any affidavit presented to the magistrate in support of the issuance of the warrant, is public information, and beginning immediately when the warrant is executed the magistrate's clerk shall make a copy of the warrant and the affidavit available for public inspection in the clerk's office during normal business hours. A person may request the clerk to provide copies of the warrant and affidavit on payment of the cost of providing the copies.

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<sup>1</sup> We assume the representative sample of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. See Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach and, therefore, does not authorize the withholding of any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

Crim. Proc. Code art. 15.26. Thus, article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure makes public an arrest warrant and an arrest warrant affidavit presented to the magistrate in support of the issuance of the warrant. As a general rule, the exceptions to disclosure found in chapter 552 of the Government Code do not apply to information that is made public by other statutes. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 623 at 3 (1994), 525 at 3 (1989). Thus, if the submitted affidavit was presented to the magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant, the department must release the affidavit in its entirety.

Next, we must address the department's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask the attorney general for a decision as to whether requested information must be disclosed not later than the tenth business day after the date of receiving the written request for information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). The department received the request for information on February 26, 2004. Therefore, the department had until March 11, 2004 to request a decision from us as to whether the requested information must be disclosed to the requestor. The department did not request a decision from us with regard to whether the requested information must be disclosed to the requestor until March 12, 2004. Therefore, we find that the department failed to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting this decision from us.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless the governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to section 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). Normally, a compelling interest is that some other source of law makes the information confidential or that third party interests are at stake. *See* Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977). In this instance, you assert that the release of the requested information will affect the law enforcement interests of another governmental body. In Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991), this office concluded that the need of another governmental body to withhold information under section 552.108 may provide a compelling reason for nondisclosure when the governmental body that received the request failed to timely seek an open records decision under section 552.301 of the Government Code. We will, therefore, address the submitted 552.108 arguments.

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 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 inform us that the requested information relates to an on going criminal investigation. You also inform us that the Williamson County Attorney's Office has requested that the information at issue not be released because release of this information would interfere with the investigation and prosecution of the case. Based on your representations, we conclude that the release of the remaining information would interfere with the investigation and prosecution of crime. See *Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. 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). We therefore agree that section 552.108(a)(1) applies to the remaining submitted information.

We note, however, that section 552.108 does not except 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*, including a detailed description of the offense. See 531 S.W.2d at 186-87. Thus, with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, you may withhold the remaining 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.

In summary, the department must release the arrest warrant affidavit if it has been presented to the magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant. The department must also release basic front page and arrest information. The department may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

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,



Debbie K. Lee  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

DKL/seg

Ref: ID# 201582

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Tom Lynch  
1109 Van Horn Way  
Cedar Park, Texas 78613  
(w/o enclosures)