



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 23, 2004

Mr. Miles K. Risley
Senior Assistant City Attorney
City of Victoria
P.O. Box 1758
Victoria, Texas 77902-1758

OR2004-7160

Dear Mr. Risley:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 207671.

The City of Victoria (the "city") received a request for all records related to three named individuals. 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 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section encompasses 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. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. 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 all information concerning certain individuals. Accordingly, we believe that the individuals' privacy rights have been implicated. Thus, to the extent the city maintains law enforcement records depicting any of the named individuals as a possible

suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, we conclude that the city must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common law privacy. *See id.*

We next address your arguments under section 552.108 for offense report number 2003-000-03832. 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), .301(e)(1)(A); see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). Based on the information you provided, we understand you to assert that offense report number 2003-000-03832 relates to a pending criminal investigation. After a careful review of the information at issue, we conclude that the release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle*, 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).

We note, however, that information normally found on the front page of an offense report is generally considered public. *See generally* Gov’t Code § 552.108(c); *Houston Chronicle*, 531 S.W.2d 177; Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976). Thus, you must release the types of information that are considered to be front page offense report information, including a detailed description of the offense, even if this information is not actually located on the front page of the offense report. Although section 552.108(a)(1) authorizes you to withhold the remaining information in offense report number 2003-000-03832 from disclosure, you may choose to release all or part of that information not otherwise confidential by law. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.007.

We note that the remaining submitted documents contain social security numbers, which must be withheld in some circumstances under section 552.101 of the Government Code.¹ A social security number or “related record” may be excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 in conjunction with the 1990 amendments to the federal Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 405(c)(2)(C)(viii)(I). *See* Open Records Decision No. 622 (1994). These amendments make confidential social security numbers and related records that are obtained and maintained by a state agency or political subdivision of the state pursuant to any provision of law enacted on or after October 1, 1990. *See id.* We have no basis for concluding that the social security numbers in the submitted information are confidential under section 405(c)(2)(C)(viii)(I), and therefore excepted from public disclosure under section 552.101 on the basis of that federal provision. We caution, however, that

¹Section 552.101 also encompasses information protected by other statutes.

section 552.352 of the Act imposes criminal penalties for the release of confidential information. Prior to releasing any social security number information, you should ensure that no such information was obtained or is maintained by the city pursuant to any provision of law enacted on or after October 1, 1990.

We also note that the remaining submitted documents contain Texas motor vehicle information. Section 552.130 provides in relevant part:

(a) Information is excepted from the requirement of Section 552.021 if the information relates to:

- (1) a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state; [or]
- (2) a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state[.]

Gov't Code §552.130(a). You must withhold the Texas motor vehicle information, which we have marked, under section 552.130.

In summary, we conclude: (1) to the extent the city maintains law enforcement records depicting any of the named individuals as a possible suspect, arrestee, or criminal defendant, the city must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common law privacy; (2) with the exception of basic information, report number 2003-000-03832 may be withheld from disclosure pursuant to section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code; (3) social security numbers may be confidential under federal law; and (4) the city must withhold the information we have marked pursuant to section 552.130 of the Government Code. The remaining submitted information must be released to the requestor.

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).

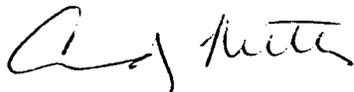
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following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



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/jh

Ref: ID# 207671
Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Daniela Dwyer
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(w/o enclosures)