ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 15, 2004

Mr. Scott A. Durfee
General Counsel
Harris County
1201 Franklin, Suite 600
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2004-10614

Dear Mr. Durfee:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 215211.

The Harris County District Attorney's Office (the "D.A.") received a request to review two specified case files. You claim that 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.

The D.A. claims that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure as attorney work product pursuant to sections 552.108(a)(4) and (b)(3) of the Government Code. Section 552.108 of the Government Code states in pertinent part:

> (a) 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:
>
> . . .
>
> (4) it is information that:

> (A) is prepared by an attorney representing the state in anticipation of or in the course of preparing for criminal litigation; or
>
> (B) represents the mental impressions or legal reasoning of an attorney representing the state.

(b) An internal record or notation of a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that is maintained for internal use in matters relating to law enforcement or prosecution is excepted from [required public disclosure] if:

. . .

(3) the internal record or notation:

> (A) is prepared by an attorney representing the state in anticipation of or in the course of preparing for criminal litigation; or
>
> (B) represents the mental impressions or legal reasoning of an attorney representing the state.

Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(4), (b)(3). A governmental body must reasonably explain how and why section 552.108 is applicable to the information that the governmental body seeks to withhold under this exception. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A); *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977); Open Records Decision No. 434 at 2-3 (1986).

In *Curry v. Walker*, 873 S.W.2d 379 (Tex. 1994), the Texas Supreme Court held that a request for a district attorney's entire file is necessarily a request for work product because "the decision as to what to include in [the file] necessarily reveals the attorney's thought processes concerning the prosecution or defense of the case." *Curry* , 873 S.W.2d at 380 (quoting *National Union Fire Insurance Company v. Valdez*, 863 S.W.2d 458, 460 (Tex. 1993, orig. proceeding)). In this instance, the requestor seeks two entire criminal case files. Therefore, we conclude that the release of the submitted information would reveal the district attorney's mental impressions or legal reasoning. Accordingly, sections 552.108(a)(4) and (b)(3) apply to the submitted information.

We note, however, that basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.108. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). Such basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*, 531 S.W.2d 177. *See* Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Thus, with the exception of basic information, you may withhold the submitted information under sections 552.108(a)(4) and (b)(3). We note that

you have the discretion to release all or part of the information protected by section 552.108 that is not otherwise confidential by law. Gov't Code § 552.007.

In summary, with the exception of basic information, the D.A. may withhold the submitted information under sections 552.108(a)(4) and (b)(3) 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,

Tamara L. Harswick

Tamara L. Harswick
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

TLH/sdk

Ref: ID# 215211

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Clyde Williams
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(w/o enclosures)