



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 14, 2005

Mr. Ernesto Rodriguez
Assistant City Attorney
City of El Paso
2 Civic Center Plaza, Ninth Floor
El Paso, Texas 79901

OR2005-08367

Dear Mr. Rodriguez:

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# 232173.

The City of El Paso (the "city") received a request for information relating to two specified cases. You state that the city has released some requested information but claim that the submitted 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.

Initially, we note that the submitted records include complaint affidavits. Article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure states "[t]he arrest warrant, and any affidavit presented to the magistrate in support of the issuance of the warrant, is public information." Crim. Proc. Code art. 15.26. Article 15.04 provides that "[t]he affidavit made before the magistrate or district or county attorney is called a 'complaint' if it charges the commission of an offense." Crim. Proc. Code art. 15.04. Case law indicates that a complaint can support the issuance of an arrest warrant. *See Janecka v. State*, 739 S.W.2d 813, 822-23 (Tex. Crim. App. 1987); *Villegas v. State*, 791 S.W.2d 226, 235 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi 1990, pet. ref'd); *Borsari v. State*, 919 S.W.2d 913, 918 (Tex. App.—Houston [14 Dist.] 1996, pet. ref'd) (discussing well-established principle that complaint in support of arrest warrant need not contain same particularity required of indictment). Therefore, to the extent the submitted complaint affidavits, which we have marked, were presented to a magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant, they are public under article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and must be released.

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 submitted police reports relate to a case that is currently being screened for possible prosecution by the Office of District Attorney for the 34th Judicial District (the “district attorney”). You further provide a letter from the district attorney stating that this case is pending and that “disclosure of these documents will interfere with the detection, investigation, and prosecution of crime[.]” Based upon these representations, we conclude that the release of the submitted information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *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).

However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov’t Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. Thus, with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, the city may withhold the submitted information from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(1). We note that the city has the discretion to release all or part of this information that is not otherwise confidential by law. Gov’t Code § 552.007.

We also note that section 552.147 of the Government Code¹ provides that “[t]he social security number of a living person is excepted from” required public disclosure under the Act. However, section 552.147 excepts information from disclosure in order to protect individuals’ privacy. Therefore, the requestor is entitled to his own social security number, and it may not be withheld from him under section 552.147. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.023 (person has a special right of access to information that is excepted from public disclosure under laws intended to protect that person’s privacy interest). The remaining social security numbers of arrestees other than the requestor must be withheld under section 552.147.²

To summarize: (1) to the extent the submitted complaint affidavits were presented to a magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant, they must be released pursuant to

¹Added by Act of May 23, 2005, 79th Leg., R.S., S.B. 1485, § 1, sec. 552.147(a) (to be codified at Tex. Gov’t Code § 552.147).

²We note that section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person’s social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act.

article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure; (2) with the exception of basic information, the city may withhold the remaining submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code; and (3) the social security numbers of arrestees other than the requestor must be withheld under section 552.147 of the Government Code.³

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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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

³Because some of this information is confidential with respect to the general public, if the city receives a future request for this information from a person other than the requestor or his representative, the city should again seek our decision.

complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,



Robert B. Rapfogel
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RBR/krl

Ref: ID# 232173

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Thurman Reynolds
8120 Bethany Drive
El Paso, Texas 79925-4812
(w/o enclosures)