



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

GREG ABBOTT

February 8, 2008

Ms. Zindia Thomas  
Assistant Attorney General  
Public Information Coordinator  
Office of the Attorney General  
P.O. Box 12548  
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

OR2008-01910

Dear Ms. Thomas:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 303247.

The Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") received a request for information concerning alleged election law violations and the misappropriation of funds in the 2006 Mount Vernon Independent School District election. The OAG claims Exhibits B - D are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.108 of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> We have considered the OAG's claimed exceptions to disclosure and have reviewed the submitted sample of information.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The OAG asserts the information is protected under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the attorney-client privilege pursuant to Texas Rule of Evidence 503. 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. It does not encompass the discovery privileges found in these rules because they are not constitutional law, statutory law, or judicial decisions. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 1-2 (2002).

<sup>2</sup>We assume that 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 that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

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).

The OAG argues section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable because Exhibits B - D relate to a pending criminal investigation conducted by its Criminal Investigations and Criminal Prosecutions Divisions. Based upon this representation, we conclude release of Exhibits B - D 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 OAG may withhold the requested 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. Because section 552.108 is dispositive, we do not address the OAG’s other assertions for Exhibits B - D.

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 file suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, 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 challenge 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 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,



Yen-Ha Le  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

YHL/sdk

Ref: ID# 303247

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Bob Sehon  
Mount Vernon ISD Trustee  
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(w/o enclosures)