



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

February 11, 2008

Ms. Charlene Sanders  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Fort Worth  
1000 Throckmorton Street  
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2008-01942

Dear Ms. Sanders:

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# 301922.

The Fort Worth Police Department (the "department") received a request from an examiner at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System, for a specified report. You state that the department will withhold certain Texas motor vehicle record information pursuant to previous determinations issued by this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(a); Open Records Decision No. 673 at 7-8 (2001). In addition, you state that the department has redacted social security numbers pursuant to section 552.147 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.147(b) (governmental body may redact social security number without necessity of requesting decision from this office under the Act). You 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.

Section 552.108(a) of the Government Code 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." Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). 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 id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex.1977). You inform us, and have provided an affidavit stating, that the submitted information is related to a pending prosecution by the Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney's Office. Based on your representation and the affidavit, we conclude that section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable

in this instance. 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, as you acknowledge, section 552.108 of the Government Code does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. *Id.* § 552.108 (c). Basic information refers to information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. See 531 S.W.2d at 186-88. With the exception of basic information, the department may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

In this instance, however, we believe the requestor may have a right of access to some of the information at issue. Section 411.089(a) of the Government Code provides that “[a] criminal justice agency is entitled to obtain from the [Department of Public Safety] any criminal history record information maintained by the [Department of Public Safety] about a person.” See Gov’t Code § 411.089(a). In addition, section 411.087(a) of the Government Code provides in pertinent part:

(a) [a] person, agency, department, political subdivision, or other entity that is authorized by this subchapter to obtain from the [Department of Public Safety] criminal history record information maintained by the [Department of Public Safety] that relates to another person is authorized to:

...

(2) obtain from any other criminal justice agency in this state criminal history record information maintained by that criminal justice agency that relates to that person.

*Id.* § 411.087(a)(2). We note that “criminal history record information” is defined as “information collected about a person by a criminal justice agency that consists of identifiable descriptions and notations of arrests, detentions, indictments, informations, and other formal criminal charges and their dispositions.” See *id.* § 411.082(2). Thus, the submitted information in this instance contains “criminal history record information.” However, a criminal justice agency that receives criminal history record information from another criminal justice agency pursuant to section 411.087(a)(2) may only receive such information for a criminal justice purpose. See *id.* §§ 411.083(c), .087(b); see also Open Records Decision No. 655 (1997) (discussing limitations on release of criminal history record information). Thus, to the extent the requestor in this instance is a “criminal justice agency,” it is authorized to obtain criminal history record information from the department pursuant to section 411.087(a)(2) of the Government Code, but only for a criminal justice purpose. See Gov’t Code §§ 411.083(c), .087(a)(2).

A "criminal justice agency" is defined in part as "a federal or state agency that is engaged in the administration of criminal justice under a statute or executive order and that allocates a substantial portion of its annual budget to the administration of criminal justice." *Id.* § 411.082(3)(A). "Administration of criminal justice" has the meaning assigned to it by article 60.01 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. *See id.* § 411.082(1). Article 60.01 of the Code of Criminal Procedure defines "administration of criminal justice" as the "performance of any of the following activities: detection, apprehension, pretrial release, post-trial release, prosecution, adjudication, correctional supervision, or rehabilitation of an offender. The term includes criminal identification activities and the collection, storage, and dissemination of criminal history record information." Code Crim. Proc. art. 60.01(1).

In this case, the requestor is an examiner at the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Instant Criminal Background Check System ("NICS"). Although it appears that NICS is engaged in the administration of criminal justice under chapter 411, we cannot determine whether it intends to use the criminal history record information for a criminal justice purpose. Consequently, if the department determines that this particular requestor is requesting the information on behalf of a criminal justice agency and intends to use the criminal history record information for a criminal justice purpose, we conclude that the department may make available to the requestor the criminal history record information from the documents, otherwise subject to section 552.108, that shows the type of allegation made and whether there was an arrest, information, indictment, detention, conviction, or other formal charges and their dispositions. *See Open Records Decision No. 451 (1986)* (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exceptions to disclosure under the Act). In that instance, with the exception of basic information, the department may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

However, if the department determines that this particular requestor is not requesting the information on behalf of a criminal justice agency or does not intend to use the criminal history record information for a criminal justice purpose, the department may withhold the submitted information, with the exception of basic information, under section 552.108 of the Government Code. *See Attorney General Opinions DM-353 at 4 n. 6 (1995)* (finding interagency transfer of information prohibited where confidentiality statute enumerates specific entities to which release of information is authorized and where potential receiving governmental body is not among statute's enumerated entities), *JM-590 at 4-5 (1986)*; *see also Open Records Decision Nos. 655 (1997), 650 (1996)* (transfer of confidential information to federal agency impermissible unless federal law requires its disclosure), *440 at 2 (1986)* (construing predecessor statute).

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,



Paige Savoie  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

PS/ma

Ref: ID# 301922

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Charlie Anderson  
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(w/o enclosures)