



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 14, 2008

Mr. Paul J. Stewart
Assistant County Attorney
Fort Bend County
301 Jackson Street, Suite 728
Richmond, Texas 77469-3108

OR2008-02142

Dear Mr. Stewart:

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# 302459.

The Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for a specified offense report involving identity theft. You state that some of the requested information has been released to the requestor. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.108, 552.130, 552.136, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We note that the submitted offense report involves an alleged violation of section 32.51 of the Penal Code, which provides that "[a] person commits an offense if the person obtains, possesses, transfers, or uses identifying information of another person without the other person's consent and with intent to harm or defraud another." Penal Code § 32.51(b). For purposes of section 32.51, "identifying information" includes an individual's name and financial institution account number. *Id.* § 32.51(a)(1)(A), (C). Article 2.29 of the Code of Criminal Procedure pertains to alleged violations of section 32.51 that occurred on or after September 1, 2005 and provides as follows:

- (a) A peace officer to whom an alleged violation of Section 32.51, Penal Code, is reported shall make a written report to the law enforcement agency that employs the peace officer that includes the following information:

- (1) the name of the victim;
- (2) the name of the suspect, if known;
- (3) the type of identifying information obtained, possessed, transferred, or used in violation of Section 32.51, Penal Code; and
- (4) the results of any investigation.

(b) On the victim's request, the law enforcement agency shall provide the report created under Subsection (a) to the victim. In providing the report, the law enforcement agency shall redact any otherwise confidential information that is included in the report, other than the information described by Subsection (a).

Crim. Proc. Code art. 2.29. For purposes of article 2.29, an offense is committed on or after September 1, 2005 if no "element of the offense occurs before that date." Act of Jun. 17, 2005, 79th Leg., R.S., ch. 294, § 1(b), 2005 Tex. Gen. Laws 885.

In this instance, the submitted information pertains to the fraudulent use of a person's identifying information, which constitutes an alleged violation of section 32.51. The requestor here is the spouse of the victim of identity theft listed in the information and the alleged offense occurred after September 1, 2005. Therefore, if the requestor is acting as the victim's authorized representative, then he has a right of access to this information. *See* Crim. Proc. Code art. 2.29. We note that section 552.108 of the Government Code does not make information confidential for purposes of article 2.29. Therefore, if the requestor is acting as the victim's authorized representative, then the submitted information must be released to the requestor pursuant to article 2.29.¹

In the event that the requestor is not acting as the victim's authorized representative, then the information at issue is not subject to article 2.29 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and we will address your claims against disclosure. Section 552.108 of the Government Code exempts from public disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime if . . . release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body that claims an exception to disclosure under section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why this exception is applicable to the information at issue. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), 552.301(e)(1)(A); *Ex parte*

¹We note that the submitted information contains private information belonging to the requestor's spouse to which, in this instance, the requestor would have a right of access. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(b) (governmental body may not deny access to person to whom information relates or person's agent on grounds that information is considered confidential by privacy principles).

Pruitt, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that the submitted information relates to a currently pending criminal investigation. Based on your representation and our review, we conclude that section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to this information. 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.*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976) (per curiam) (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*. See *id.* at 186-7. Thus, with the exception of the basic information, the sheriff may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.²

In summary, if the requestor is acting as the victim's authorized representative, the sheriff must release the submitted information pursuant to article 2.29 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. However, if the requestor is not the authorized representative of the victim, then, with the exception of basic information, the submitted information may be withheld under section 552.108 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 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

²As our ruling is dispositive for this information, we need not address your remaining claims against disclosure.

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,



Allan D. Meesey
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ADM/eeg

Ref: ID# 302459

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Reynold Malmer
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(w/o enclosures)