



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 17, 2008

Mr. Clark T. Askins
Askins & Askins, P.C.
P.O. Box 1218
La Porte, Texas 77572-1218

OR2008-12810

Dear Mr. Askins:

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# 321876.

The City of La Porte (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for e-mails to the city's code enforcement officer on a specified date pertaining to a specified address. 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) 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. By its terms, section 552.108 applies only to a law enforcement agency or a prosecutor. You state that the city's code enforcement department investigates alleged violations of state and city criminal regulations. We understand that the city's Inspection Services Division (the "division") investigates violations of city ordinances and that violation of certain ordinances is a criminal offense. We understand that the division refers such offenses for prosecution in La Porte Municipal Court. Therefore, we conclude that the division is a law enforcement agency for purposes of section 552.108.

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), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that the submitted information pertains to an ongoing investigation. You also state that release of the submitted information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. Based on this representation and our review of the submitted information, we agree that the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. 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).

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). If the governmental body does not file suit over 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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura E. Ream".

Laura E. Ream
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LER/jb

Ref: ID# 321876

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Jessica
c/o Mr. Clark T. Askins
Askins & Askins, P.C.
P.O. Box 1218
La Porte, Texas 77572-1218
(w/o enclosures)