



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

March 6, 2009

Ms. Cynthia R. Garza  
Assistant Criminal District Attorney  
Dallas County  
Frank Crowley Courts Building  
133 North Industrial Boulevard, LB-19  
Dallas, Texas 75207-4399

OR2009-02940

Dear Ms. Garza:

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# 336723.

The Dallas County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney") received a request for information pertaining to five specified prosecutions that arose out of a single investigation. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.108, 552.111, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We also understand you to raise section 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

You assert the requested records should be withheld in their entirety under section 552.108(a)(4) of the Government Code. Section 552.108 provides in relevant part:

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<sup>1</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.

(a) Information held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime is excepted from [required public disclosure] if:

...

(4) it is information that:

(A) is prepared by an attorney representing the state in anticipation of or in the course of preparing for criminal litigation; or

(B) represents the mental impressions or legal reasoning of an attorney representing the state.

Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(4). 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 that the governmental body seeks to withhold. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A); *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977); Open Records Decision No. 434 at 2-3 (1986). In *Curry v. Walker*, 873 S.W.2d 379 (Tex. 1994), the Texas Supreme Court held that a request for a district attorney's "entire litigation file" was "too broad" and, quoting *Nat'l Union Fire Ins. Co. v. Valdez*, 863 S.W.2d 458 (Tex. 1993, orig. proceeding), held that "the decision as to what to include in [the file], necessarily reveals the attorney's thought processes concerning the prosecution or defense of the case." *Curry*, 873 S.W.2d at 380. In this instance, the requestor seeks the district attorney's investigative files related to charges against five named individuals. We agree that this request is so broad as to encompass the district attorney's entire prosecution file. Accordingly, we conclude that section 552.108(a)(4) is applicable in this instance.

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 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). *See* Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information made public by *Houston Chronicle*). Thus, with the exception of basic information, the district attorney may withhold the submitted information from disclosure under section 552.108(a)(4) of the Government Code. We note that basic information includes information about arrested individuals. *See* ORD 127. You assert, however, that information pertaining to one of the arrestees at issue must be withheld under section 552.101.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't

Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as chapter 55 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Articles 55.01 through 55.05 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provide for the expunction of criminal records in certain limited circumstances. Article 55.03 prescribes the effect of an expunction order and provides:

When the order of expunction is final:

- (1) the release, maintenance, dissemination, or use of the expunged records and files for any purpose is prohibited;
- (2) except as provided in Subdivision (3) of this article, the person arrested may deny the occurrence of the arrest and the existence of the expunction order; and
- (3) the person arrested or any other person, when questioned under oath in a criminal proceeding about an arrest for which the records have been expunged, may state only that the matter in question has been expunged.

Crim. Proc. Code art. 55.03. Article 55.04 imposes sanctions for violations of an expunction order and provides in relevant part:

Sec. 1. A person who acquires knowledge of an arrest while an officer or employee of the state or of any agency or other entity of the state . . . and who knows of an order expunging the records and files relating to that arrest commits an offense if he knowingly releases, disseminates, or otherwise uses the records or files.

*Id.* art. 55.04, § 1. This office has previously determined that the expunction statute prevails over the Act. *See* Open Records Decision No. 457 at 2 (1987) (governmental body prohibited from releasing or disseminating arrest records subject to expunction order, as “those records are not subject to public disclosure under the [Act]”). In this instance, you inform this office that one of the original arrestees was found to be innocent and that his records regarding this case have since been expunged. Based on your representations, we agree that any information identifying this individual is confidential under article 55.03 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Accordingly, in releasing basic information about this incident, the district attorney must not release any information identifying the individual whose criminal records have been expunged.

In summary, except for basic information, the district attorney may withhold the submitted records under section 552.108(a)(4) of the Government Code.<sup>2</sup> However, in releasing basic information, any information identifying an individual whose criminal records have been expunged must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with article 55.03 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at [http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index\\_orl.php](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php), or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General at (512) 475-2497.

Sincerely,



Matt Entsminger  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MRE/jb

Ref: ID# 336723

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

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<sup>2</sup>As our ruling under section 552.108 is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure, except to note that basic information may generally not be withheld from public disclosure under section 552.103. Open Records Decision No. 597 (1991).