ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 24, 2011

Ms. Susan Fillion
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2011-12264

Dear Ms. Fillion:

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# 432367 (CA File No.11PIA0283).

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (the "institute") received a request for information pertaining to a specified autopsy report. You claim 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 information at issue.

You assert the submitted information is excepted under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. Section 552.108(a)(1) excepts from 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 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). Section 552.108 may be invoked by the proper custodian of information relating to an investigation or prosecution of criminal conduct. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 474 at 4-5 (1987). Where a governmental body possesses information relating to a pending case of a law enforcement agency, the governmental body agency may withhold the information under section 552.108 if (1) it demonstrates the information relates to the pending case and (2) this office is provided with a representation from the law enforcement entity that the law enforcement entity wishes to withhold the information.

You have provided an affidavit stating the Harris County Sheriff's Office object to disclosure of the submitted autopsy report because its release would interfere with its ongoing criminal investigation. Based on this representation, we find release of the submitted information at this time would interfere with the ongoing criminal investigations and prosecutions. Therefore, we conclude the institute may withhold the submitted information from disclosure 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. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976).

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, 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, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

Paige Lay

Paige Lay
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PL/bs

Ref: ID# 432367

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)