



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 22, 2012

Ms. Samantha Dyal
Fulbright & Jaworski, L.L.P.
300 Convent Street, Suite 2100
San Antonio, Texas 78205

OR2012-09676

Dear Ms. Dyal:

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# 461756.

The Schertz Police Department (the "department"), which you represent, received a request for information related to a fatal accident. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.108, 552.130, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We note the submitted information includes a crash report completed pursuant to chapter 550 of the Transportation Code. *See* Transp. Code § 550.064 (officer's accident report). Section 550.065(b) of the Transportation Code states that except as provided by subsection (c) or (e), accident reports are privileged and confidential. *See id.* § 550.065(b). Section 550.065(c)(4) provides for the release of an accident report to a person who provides two of the following three items of information: (1) the date of the accident; (2) the name of any person involved in the accident; and (3) the specific location of the accident. *See id.* § 550.065(c)(4). Under this provision, the Texas Department of Transportation or another governmental entity is required to release a copy of an accident report to a person who provides the agency with two or more of the items of information specified by the statute. *Id.*

In this instance, the requestor has provided the department with the specified items of information. Although you seek to withhold this information under section 552.108 of the Government Code, we note information that is specifically made public by statute may not

be withheld from the public pursuant to the general exceptions under the Act. *See, e.g.*, Open Records Decision Nos. 544 (1990), 378 (1983), 161 (1977), 146 (1976).

You also assert portions of the CR-3 crash report are confidential under section 552.130 of the Government Code. Section 552.130 provides information relating to motor vehicle title or registration issued by a Texas agency is excepted from public release. Gov't Code § 552.130(a)(1). As noted above, a statutory right of access generally prevails over the Act's general exceptions to disclosure. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 623 at 3 (1994) (exceptions in Act in applicable to information that statutes expressly make public), 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exception to disclosure under the Act). However, because section 552.130 has its own access provisions, we conclude section 552.130 is not a general exception under the Act. Thus, we must address the conflict between the access provided under section 550.065 of the Transportation Code and the confidentiality provided under section 552.130. Where information falls within both a general and a specific provision of law, the specific provision prevails over the general. *See Horizon/CMS Healthcare Corp. v. Auld*, 34 S.W.3d 887, 901 (Tex. 2000) ("more specific statute controls over the more general"); *Cuellar v. State*, 521 S.W.2d 277 (Tex. Crim. App. 1975) (under well-established rule of statutory construction, specific statutory provisions prevail over general ones); Open Records Decision Nos. 598 (1991), 583 (1990), 451 (1986).

In this instance, section 550.065 specifically provides access only to accident reports of the type at issue in this request, while section 552.130 generally excepts Texas motor vehicle record information maintained in any context. Thus, we conclude the access to accident reports provided under section 550.065 is more specific than the general confidentiality provided under section 552.130. Accordingly, the department may not withhold any portion of the accident report form under section 552.130. Therefore, the department must release the CR-3 accident report form in its entirety to the requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c)(4) of the Transportation Code.

Next, we address your claim under section 552.108 of the Government Code for the rest of the submitted information. Section 552.108 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 must reasonably explain how and why section 552.108 is applicable to the information at issue. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A); *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977).

You inform us that release of the remaining information would interfere with a pending criminal investigation. Based on your representation, we find release of the remaining information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *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 present in active cases), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976).

However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure “basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime.” *Id.* § 552.108(c). Section 552.108(c) refers to the basic front-page information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. See 531 S.W.2d at 186-88. The department must release basic offense and arrest information, including a detailed description of the offense, even if the information does not literally appear on the front page of an offense or arrest report. See Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). We note basic information described in *Houston Chronicle* does not include information subject to section 552.130 of the Government Code. Except for basic information, the department may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.¹

In summary, the department must release the marked crash report to this requestor in its entirety pursuant to section 550.065(c)(4) of the Transportation Code. With the exception of basic information, the department may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

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,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/dls

¹As our ruling for this information is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against release of some of this information.

Ref: ID# 461756

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)