



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

August 12, 2013

Ms. Cheryl Elliott Thornton  
Assistant County Attorney  
County of Harris  
1019 Congress, 15th Floor  
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2013-13982

Dear Ms. Thornton:

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# 500353 (C.A. File No. 13PIA0313).

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (the "institute") received a request for all coroner's reports involving intentional or unintentional deaths by firearm for children fourteen and younger since 1999. 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 submitted information.

Initially, we note you have only submitted one report for our review. To the extent any other responsive reports existed on the date the institute received the present request for information, we assume any such information has been released. If the institute has not released this information, it must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301 (a), .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible).

Section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code 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 id.* § 552.301(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 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 Houston Police Department (the "department") objects to disclosure of the submitted information because its release would interfere with the department's ongoing criminal investigation. Based on this representation, we find release of the information at this time would interfere with the ongoing criminal investigation. 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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl\\_ruling\\_info.shtml](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml), 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Ana Carolina Vieira  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

ACV/eb

Ref: ID# 500353

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)