



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

September 16, 2013

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

OR2013-16053

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# 504067 (C.A. File No. 13PIA0416).

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (the "institute") received a request for 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 submitted information.

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(a)(1) must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(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 a pending investigation or prosecution of criminal conduct. *See Open Records Decision No. 474 at 4-5 (1987)*. Where a non-law enforcement agency has custody of information that would otherwise qualify for exception under section 552.108 as information relating to the pending case of a law enforcement agency, the custodian of the records may withhold the information if it provides this office with a demonstration the information

relates to the pending case and a representation from the law enforcement agency that it wishes to have the information withheld.

You state the submitted is related to an active criminal investigation by the Harris County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office"). You have provided documentation demonstrating the sheriff's office objects to disclosure of the information at issue because its release would interfere with the investigation. Based on your representation, we conclude the institute may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code on behalf of the sheriff's office. *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,



Paige Lay  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

PL/bhf

Ref: ID# 504067

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)