



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 25, 2014

Ms. Susan Fillion
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County Sheriff's Office
1200 Baker Street, 2nd Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2014-17094

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# 537531 (HCSO File No. 14SO60078).

The Harris County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident involving a named individual. 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). You state the submitted information pertains to a pending criminal investigation. Based on your representation and our review, we agree release of the information at issue 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 that are present in active cases), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per*

curiam, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, we find section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the information at issue.

However, we note 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* and includes a detailed description of the offense. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Thus, with the exception of the basic information, the sheriff’s office may generally withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

We note, however, the requestor is an investigator with the Texas State Board of Pharmacy (the “board”). Section 411.122(a) of the Government Code provides that

[A]n agency of this state listed in Subsection (d) . . . that licenses or regulates members of a particular trade, occupation, business, vocation, or profession is entitled to obtain from the [Department of Public Safety] criminal history record information maintained by the [Department of Public Safety] that relates to a person who:

- (1) is an applicant for a license from the agency;
- (2) is the holder of a license from the agency; or
- (3) requests a determination of eligibility for a license from the agency.

Gov’t Code § 411.122(a). We note that the board is specifically subject to section 411.122 of the Government Code. *See id.* § 411.122(d)(14). In addition, section 411.087(a) of the Government Code provides in pertinent part:

(a) [A] person, agency, department, political subdivision, or other entity that is authorized by this subchapter to obtain from the [Department of Public Safety] criminal history record information maintained by the [Department of Public Safety] that relates to another person is authorized to:

...

- (2) obtain from any other criminal justice agency in this state criminal history record information maintained by that criminal justice agency that relates to that person.

Id. § 411.087(a)(2). “Criminal history record information” (“CHRI”) is defined as “information collected about a person by a criminal justice agency that consists of identifiable descriptions and notations of arrests, detentions, indictments, informations, and other formal criminal charges and their dispositions.” *See id.* § 411.082(2). Thus, under sections 411.122 and 411.087, the requestor may have a right of access to any CHRI about the named individual contained in the sheriff’s office’s records. The submitted information lists the named individual as an arrested person. Thus, the report contains CHRI about this individual.

Accordingly, if the individual at issue is an applicant for a license from the board, a holder of a license from the board, or has requested a determination of eligibility for a license from the board, then the requestor is authorized to obtain the CHRI pertaining to the named individual in the submitted report from the sheriff’s office pursuant to section 411.087(a)(2) of the Government Code. *See id.* §§ 411.087(a)(2), .122(a). Although you raise section 552.108 of the Government Code for such information, a specific statutory right of access overcomes the general exceptions in the Act, such as section 552.108. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 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 exceptions to disclosure under the Act). Thus, if any of these conditions are met, then the sheriff’s office must make available to the requestor CHRI pertaining to the named individual under section 411.087. In that instance, with the exception of basic information, the sheriff’s office may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. However, if the individual at issue does not meet any of the criteria of subsections 411.122(1)-(3), then the board does not have a special right of access to the CHRI under section 411.087. In that event, with the exception of basic information, the sheriff’s office may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

In summary, if the board has a right of access pursuant to section 411.087(a)(2) of the Government Code, the sheriff’s office must make available to the requestor CHRI regarding the named individual under section 411.087, but, with the exception of basic information, may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. If the board does not have a right of access to the CHRI under section 411.087, then, with the exception of basic information, the sheriff’s office may withhold the submitted 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.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,



Megan G. Holloway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MGH/akg

Ref: ID# 537531

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)