



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 3, 2014

Ms. Evelyn W. Kimeu
Staff Attorney
Houston Police Department
1200 Travis
Houston, Texas 77002-6000

OR2014-21868

Dear Ms. Kimeu:

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# 545302 (Houston ORU No. 14-5982).

The Houston Police Department (the "department") received a request for several categories of information regarding the number of unarmed individuals who have been killed and/or injured while pursued or in police custody, as well as the names, seniority, and personnel files of the officers involved in these shootings and/or injuries. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. We understand the City of Houston is a

¹We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. See Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

civil service city under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. Section 143.089 provides for the maintenance of two different types of personnel files for each police officer employed by a civil service city: one that must be maintained as part of the officer's civil service file and another that the police department may maintain for its own internal use. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a), (g). Under section 143.089(a), the officer's civil service file must contain certain specified items, including commendations, periodic evaluations by the police officer's supervisor, and documents relating to any misconduct in any instance in which the department took disciplinary action against the officer under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. *Id.* § 143.089(a)(1)-(3). Chapter 143 prescribes the following types of disciplinary actions: removal, suspension, demotion, and uncompensated duty. *Id.* §§ 143.051-.055. In cases in which a police department investigates a police officer's misconduct and takes disciplinary action against an officer, it is required by section 143.089(a)(2) to place all investigatory records relating to the investigation and disciplinary action, including background documents such as complaints, witness statements, and documents of like nature from individuals who were not in a supervisory capacity, in the police officer's civil service file maintained under section 143.089(a). *See Abbott v. Corpus Christi*, 109 S.W.3d 113,122 (Tex. App.—Austin 2003, no pet.).

All investigatory materials in a case resulting in disciplinary action are "from the employing department" when they are held by or are in the possession of the department because of its investigation into a police officer's misconduct, and the department must forward them to the civil service commission for placement in the civil service personnel file. *Id.* Such records may not be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(f); Open Records Decision No. 562 at 6 (1990). Information relating to alleged misconduct or disciplinary action taken must be removed from the police officer's civil service file if the police department determines that there is insufficient evidence to sustain the charge of misconduct or that the disciplinary action was taken without just cause. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(b)-(c).

Section 143.089(g) authorizes a police department to maintain, for its own use, a separate and independent internal personnel file relating to a police officer. *See id.* § 143.089(g). Section 143.089(g) provides as follows:

A fire or police department may maintain a personnel file on a fire fighter or police officer employed by the department for the department's use, but the department may not release any information contained in the department file to any agency or person requesting information relating to a fire fighter or police officer. The department shall refer to the director or the director's designee a person or agency that requests information that is maintained in the fire fighter's or police officer's personnel file.

Id. In *City of San Antonio v. Texas Attorney General*, 851 S.W.2d 946 (Tex. App.—Austin 1993, writ denied), the court addressed a request for information contained in a police officer’s personnel file maintained by the police department for its use and the applicability of section 143.089(g) to that file. The records included in the departmental personnel file related to complaints against the police officer for which no disciplinary action was taken. The court determined section 143.089(g) made these records confidential. *See City of San Antonio*, 851 S.W.2d at 949; *see also City of San Antonio v. San Antonio Express-News*, 47 S.W.3d 556 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 2000, pet. denied) (restricting confidentiality under Local Gov’t Code § 143.089(g) to “information reasonably related to a police officer’s or fire fighter’s employment relationship”); Attorney General Opinion JC-0257 at 6-7 (2000) (addressing functions of Local Gov’t Code § 143.089(a) and (g) files).

You state the information submitted as Exhibit 2 is contained within the department’s internal files maintained pursuant to section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code. Based on your representation and our review, we find Exhibit 2 is confidential under section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code and must be withheld from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

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.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), 301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state Exhibit 3 is an open and active criminal investigation, which has been referred to the Harris County Grand Jury for review. *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). Based on these representations, we conclude section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code is applicable to Exhibit 3.

Section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information concerning an investigation that concluded in a result other than conviction or deferred adjudication. Gov’t Code § 552.108(a)(2). A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(2) must demonstrate the requested information relates to a criminal investigation that concluded in a final result other than a conviction or deferred adjudication. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A); Open Records Decision No. 434 at 2–3 (1986). You state Exhibit 4 pertains to a concluded criminal investigation that did not result in a conviction or deferred adjudication. Based on these representations, we conclude section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code is applicable to Exhibit 4.

However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. 531 S.W.2d at 186–87. This information includes, but is not limited to, a detailed description of the offense. See Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). Thus, with the exception of basic information, the department may withhold Exhibit 3 under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code and Exhibit 4 under section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code.

In summary, the department must withhold Exhibit 2 under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code. With the exception of basic information, the department may withhold Exhibit 3 under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code and Exhibit 4 under section 552.108(a)(2) 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,



Abigail T. Adams
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ATA/ac

Ref: ID# 545302

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)