



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 22, 2016

Ms. Cary Grace
Assistant City Attorney
City of Austin
P. O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767-8828

OR2016-01657

Dear Ms. Grace:

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# 601685 (ORR # 12-23593).

The Austin Police Department (the "department") received a request for a specified police 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.

We first note, and you acknowledge, the department did not comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting this decision. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b), (e). A governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption the requested information is public and must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342, 350 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to section 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). This statutory presumption can generally be overcome when information is confidential by law or third-party interests are at stake. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 630 at 3 (1994), 325 at 2 (1982). Although you raise section 552.108 of the Government Code, this section is a discretionary exception to

disclosure that protect a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions in general), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver). Thus, in failing to comply with section 552.301, the department has waived its argument under section 552.108. However, the interests of a governmental body, other than the one that failed to comply with section 552.301, to withhold information under section 552.108 can provide a compelling reason for non-disclosure under section 552.302. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 586 (1991), 469 (1987). You inform us, and provide documentation showing, the Travis County Attorney's Office (the "county attorney's office") objects to the release of the information at issue. Therefore, we will consider whether the department may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108 of the Government Code on behalf of the county attorney's office.

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). The county attorney's office states the report at issue pertains to a pending criminal case. Based on these representations and our review, we conclude the release of the submitted 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 that are present in active cases), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the submitted information.

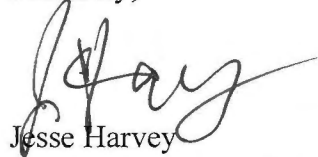
However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Accordingly, with the exception of the basic information, the department may withhold submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code on behalf of the county attorney's office.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Harvey", written over the printed name.

Jesse Harvey
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JH/eb

Ref: ID# 601685

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)