



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 23, 2017

Ms. Kristina Vega
City Secretary
City of Gonzales
P.O. Box 547
Gonzales, Texas 78629

OR2017-24070

Dear Ms. Vega:

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# 682018.

The City of Gonzales (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. 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 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, 710 (Tex. 1977). You state the submitted information relates to an open case. Based upon this representation, 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, 186-87 (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, 560-61 (Tex. 1976). Thus, section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the submitted information.

However, section 552.108(a)(1) 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 186-87; Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Accordingly, with the exception of basic information, the city may generally withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

In this instance, however, the requestor is with the Gonzales Housing Authority (the "housing authority"). The Texas Department of Public Safety ("DPS") is required to provide criminal history record information ("CHRI") to a noncriminal justice agency that is authorized to receive CHRI pursuant to a federal statute, executive order, or state statute. See Gov't Code § 411.083(b)(2). In Open Records Decision No. 655 (1997), this office concluded a local housing authority is a noncriminal justice agency authorized by federal statute to receive CHRI. See ORD 655 at 4. The federal Housing Opportunity Program Extension Act of 1996 authorizes housing authorities to obtain criminal records of applicants and tenants. Section 1437d(q)(1)(A) of title 42 of the United States Code provides "the National Crime Information Center, police departments, and other law enforcement agencies shall, upon request, provide information to public housing agencies regarding the criminal conviction records of adult applicants for, or tenants of, public housing for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement, and eviction." 42 U.S.C. § 1437d(q)(1)(A). Pursuant to section 411.087 of the Government Code, an agency that is entitled to obtain CHRI from DPS is also authorized to "obtain from any other criminal justice agency in this state [CHRI] maintained by that [agency]." Gov't Code § 411.087(a)(2). Thus, a housing authority is also authorized to obtain CHRI from a local criminal justice agency such as the city's police department. See ORD 655 at 4; see also Gov't Code §§ 411.083(b)(2), .087(a). CHRI consists of "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." Gov't Code § 411.082(2).

Federal law limits the purposes for which a public housing authority may request CHRI. Federal law provides that (1) public housing agencies may receive CHRI for adult applicants for public housing or for adult tenants of public housing, and (2) CHRI may only be used for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement, and eviction. 42 U.S.C. § 1437d(q)(1)(A). Section 1437d(q)(1)(A) states a housing authority shall be provided access to the CHRI "[n]otwithstanding any other provision of law." *Id.* Based on this language, we conclude section 1437d(q)(1)(A) prevails over section 552.108 of the Government Code. *Cf. Equal Employment Opportunity Comm'n v. City of Orange, Texas*, 905 F. Supp. 381, 382 (E.D. Tex. 1995) (federal law prevails over inconsistent provision of state law). Accordingly, if the information at issue relates to an applicant or tenant of the housing authority, and the city determines the housing authority intends to use the CHRI for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement, or eviction, then, we find the city must release the information that shows the type of allegation made and whether there was an arrest, information, indictment, detention, conviction, or other formal charges and their dispositions.

See Open Records Decision No. 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exceptions to disclosure under the Act). In that instance, with the exception of basic information, the city may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. However, if the information at issue does not relate to an applicant or tenant of the housing authority, or the city determines the housing authority does not intend to use the CHRI for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement, or eviction, then, with the exception of basic information, the city 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,



Britni Ramirez
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BR/gw

Ref: ID# 682018

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)