



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

April 8, 2019

Ms. Kristie L. Lewis
Staff Attorney
Houston Police Department
1200 Travis, 21st Floor
Houston, Texas 77002-6000

OR2019-09373

Dear Ms. Lewis:

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# 766275 (ORU No. 19-02374).

The Houston Emergency Center (the "center") received a request for information pertaining to 9-1-1 calls regarding 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.

Initially, we must address the procedural obligations of the center under section 552.301 of the Government Code, which prescribes the procedures that a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days of receiving the written request. *See* Gov't Code. § 552.301(b). You inform us the center received the request for information on February 26, 2019. You do not inform us the center was closed on any business days between February 26, 2019, and March 12, 2019. Accordingly, the center's ten-business-day deadline to request a ruling was March 12, 2019. However, the envelope in which you submitted to this office the information required by section 552.301(b) was postmarked March 13, 2019. *See id.* § 552.308(a)(1) (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency mail). Consequently, we find the center failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless there is 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 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ). The need of a governmental body, other than the governmental body that failed to timely seek an open records decision, to withhold information under section 552.108 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason sufficient to overcome the presumption of openness. *See* Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991). Because you inform us the Houston Police Department (the “department”) objects to the release of the information at issue, we will consider whether the center may withhold the information under section 552.108 of the Government Code on behalf of the department.

Section 552.108(a) 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: (1) 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 release of the requested information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *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 any 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 governmental body has custody of information relating to a pending case of a law enforcement agency, the custodian of the records may withhold the information if it provides this office with a demonstration that 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 department objects to the release of the submitted information because it relates to an open criminal investigation, and release of the information would interfere with the investigation and prosecution of the case. Based upon your representations and the submitted documentation, 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. Accordingly, the center may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code on behalf of the department.

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 "K Hillis", written over a horizontal line.

Kieran Hillis
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KH/jxd

Ref: ID# 766275

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)