



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 30, 2020

Ms. Raika Rowe
Public Information Coordinator
Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission
P.O. Box 13127
Austin, Texas 78711-3127

OR2020-09681

Dear Ms. Rowe:

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# 821522 (PIR No. R002226-012220).

The Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (the "commission") received a request for all records pertaining to a specified establishment. You state you will release some information. You claim the submitted 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 information.

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 made confidential by other statutes. Section 5.48 of the Alcoholic Beverage Code provides as follows:

- (a) "Private records," as used in this section, means all records of a permittee, licensee, or other person other than the name, proposed location, and type of permit or license sought in an application for an original or renewal permit or license, or in a periodic report relating to the importation, distribution, or sale of alcoholic beverages required by the commission to be regularly filed by a permittee or licensee.
- (b) The private records of a permittee or licensee, or other person that are required or obtained by the commission or its agents, in connection with an investigation or otherwise, are privileged unless introduced in evidence in a hearing before the commission or before a court in this state or the United States.

Alco. Bev. Code § 5.48. The term “privileged” in this statute has been construed to mean “confidential” for purposes of the Act. Attorney General Opinion JM-1235 at 2 (1990); Open Records Decision Nos. 186 (1978), 62 (1974). Thus, section 5.48 makes confidential any records required or obtained by the commission, with the exception of “the name, proposed location, and type of permit or license sought in an application for an original or renewal permit or license” and “a periodic report relating to the importation, distribution, or sale of alcoholic beverages required by the commission to be regularly filed by a permittee or licensee.” Alco. Bev. Code § 5.48.

You explain the information in Exhibit E consists of application and renewal records for commission licenses or permits and communications within the commission related to the application and renewal records. You state none of the information at issue has been introduced as evidence in a hearing before the commission or before a court in Texas or the United States. Based upon your representations and our review, we agree Exhibit E constitutes private records under section 5.48 of the Alcoholic Beverage Code. Accordingly, with the exception of the name, proposed location, and type of permit sought in the relevant applications, which you state the commission will release, the commission must withhold Exhibit E under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 5.48 of the Alcoholic Beverage 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). Generally, a governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(1) must explain how and why 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). By its terms, section 552.108 applies only to a law enforcement agency or a prosecutor. We note the commission’s Enforcement Division is a law enforcement agency. *See* Alco. Bev. Code §§ 5.14 (commission may commission inspectors with police powers to enforce Alcoholic Beverage Code), .36 (commission shall investigate violations of Alcoholic Beverage Code and other laws relating to alcoholic beverages), .361 (commission shall develop risk-based approach to enforcement).

The commission states Exhibit C pertains to a pending criminal investigation by its Enforcement Division. Based upon this representation and our review, we conclude release of Exhibit B 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 Exhibit C.

Section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information concerning an investigation that did not result in conviction or deferred adjudication. *See* 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.* §§ 552.108(a)(2), .301(e)(1)(A) (governmental body must provide comments explaining why exceptions

raised should apply to information requested). By its terms, section 552.108 applies only to a law enforcement agency or a prosecutor. As noted above, the commission's Enforcement Division is a law enforcement agency. *See* Alco. Bev. Code §§ 5.14, .36, .361.

You state Exhibit D pertains to closed criminal investigations of the commission's Enforcement Division that did not result in convictions or deferred adjudications. Based upon this representation and our review, we agree section 552.108(a)(2) is applicable to Exhibit D.

However, we note, and you acknowledge, 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). Section 552.108(c) refers to the basic information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Accordingly, with the exception of basic information, which you state you will release, the commission may withhold Exhibit C under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code and Exhibit D under section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code.

In summary, with the exception of the name, proposed location, and type of permit sought in the relevant applications, which you state the commission will release, the commission must withhold Exhibit E under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 5.48 of the Alcoholic Beverage Code. With the exception of basic information, which you state the commission will release, the commission may withhold Exhibit C under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code and Exhibit D 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 <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/rm

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Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)