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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 31, 2020

Ms. Marie N. Johnson
Counsel for the City of Denison
Messer, Fort & McDonald, PLLC
6371 Preston Road, Suite 200
Frisco, Texas 75034

OR2020-09802

Dear Ms. Johnson:

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# 820086 (COD ORR ID: D011520SM).

The City of Denison (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for all records pertaining to a named individual, including a specified incident. You state the city has released some information to the requestor. 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 (Tex. 1977). You state the submitted information pertains to an active criminal investigation and prosecution. Based on your representation and our review, we conclude release of the information at issue 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, we conclude section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the submitted information.

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). 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). Thus, with the exception of the basic information, the city may generally withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.¹

In this instance, however, the requestor is a representative of the United States District Court Probation and Pretrial Services for the Eastern District of Texas (the "probation office") and may have a right of access to some of the submitted information. Section 411.089(a) of the Government Code provides "[a] criminal justice agency is entitled to obtain from the [Texas Department of Public Safety (the "DPS")] any criminal history record information [{"CHRI"}] maintained by the [DPS] about a person." Gov't Code § 411.089(a). Additionally, section 411.087(a) of the Government Code provides in part:

(a) [a] person, agency, department, political subdivision, or other entity that is authorized by this subchapter or Subchapter E-1 to obtain from [DPS CHRI] maintained by [DPS] that relates to another person is authorized to:

...

(2) obtain from any other criminal justice agency in this state [CHRI] maintained by that criminal justice agency that relates to that person.

Id. § 411.087(a)(2). CHRI is defined as "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." *Id.* § 411.082(2).

The submitted documents contain CHRI pertaining to the named individual. However, a criminal justice agency that receives CHRI from another criminal justice agency pursuant to section 411.087(a)(2) may only receive such information for a criminal justice purpose. See *id.* §§ 411.083(c), .087(b); see also Open Records Decision No. 655 (1997) (discussing limitations on release of CHRI). Thus, if the probation office is a "criminal justice agency," then the requestor is authorized to obtain CHRI pertaining to the named individual from the department pursuant to section 411.087(a)(2) of the Government Code, but only for a criminal justice purpose. See Gov't Code §§ 411.083(c), .087(a)(2).

A "criminal justice agency" is defined in part as "a federal or state agency that is engaged in the administration of criminal justice under a statute or executive order and that allocates a substantial portion of its annual budget to the administration of criminal justice[.]" *Id.* § 411.082(3)(A). "Administration of criminal justice" has the meaning assigned by article 66.001 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. See *id.* § 411.082(1). Article 66.001 of the

¹ As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining argument against disclosure of the submitted information.

Code of Criminal Procedure defines “administration of criminal justice” as the “performance of any of the following activities: detection, apprehension, detention, pretrial release, post-trial release, prosecution, adjudication, correctional supervision, or rehabilitation of an offender. The term includes criminal identification activities and the collection, storage, and dissemination of [CHRI].” Crim. Proc. Code art. 66.001(1).

We understand the probation office is a criminal justice agency as defined by section 411.082. *See* Gov’t Code § 411.082(3)(A). We also understand the information at issue will be used for criminal justice purposes. Thus, the city must make CHRI pertaining to the named individual available to the requestor. *See* Open Records Decision No. 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exceptions to disclosure under the Act).

In summary, the city must release the CHRI pertaining to the named individual to this requestor pursuant to section 411.087(a)(2) of the Government Code. With the exception of the basic information, which you state has been released, the city may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

Finally, you note the city has previously asked this office to issue a previous determination permitting the city to withhold information subject to section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.301(a) (allowing governmental body to withhold information subject to previous determination); Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001). We note a previous determination has been recently issued by this office to the city and refer you to Open Records Letter No. 2020-07747 (2020). 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,

Gerald Arismendez
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

GAA/jxd

Ref: ID# 820086

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)