



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 13, 2020

Ms. Charla Thomas
Assistant City Attorney
City of Temple
2 North Main Street, Suite 308
Temple, Texas 76501

OR2020-25787

Dear Ms. Thomas:

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# 848734 (PIR Nos. 20-1744 and 20-1825).

The City of Temple (the “city”) received two requests from the same requestor for 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 (Tex. 1977). You state the submitted information pertains to an open criminal case. Based on your representation, we conclude the 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). Therefore, we agree section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the submitted information.

However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about a crime. Gov’t Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in

Houston Chronicle, 531 S.W.2d at 186–87. See Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by Houston Chronicle). Thus, with the exception of basic information, which the city must release, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

However, the requestor is a representative of the Civil Police Liaison Office of the Directorate of Emergency Services of the United States Army (the “Army”) and, thus, may have a right of access to some of the information at issue. 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 [DPS] about a person.” See Gov’t Code § 411.089(a). In addition, section 411.087(a)(2) of the Government Code provides,

(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.” See id. § 411.082(2). Thus, the submitted information contains CHRI. However, a criminal justice agency that receives CHRI from another criminal justice agency pursuant to section 411.087(a)(2) may receive such information only 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). Accordingly, to the extent the requestor represents a “criminal justice agency,” he is authorized to obtain CHRI 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(b).

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 to it by article 60.01 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. See id. § 411.082(1). Article 60.01 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 criminal history record information.” Crim. Proc. Code art. 60.01(1).

We are unable to determine whether the requestor is a representative of a criminal justice agency or whether the requestor intends to use the CHRI for a criminal justice purpose. We note a statutory right of access generally prevails over exceptions to public disclosure under

the Act. See Open Records Decision Nos. 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exceptions to disclosure under the Act). Consequently, if the department determines (1) the requestor is a representative of a criminal justice agency for purposes of chapter 411 and (2) the requestor intends to use the CHRI for a criminal justice purpose, then the department must release the CHRI and basic information, but may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. However, if the department determines the requestor either is not a representative of a criminal justice agency for purposes of chapter 411 or does not intend to use the CHRI for a criminal justice purpose, then the city must release basic information, but may withhold the remaining 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 <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,

Britni Ramirez
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BR/gw

Ref: ID# 848734

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)