



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 10, 2020

Ms. Judy Hickman
Assistant Supervisor
Beaumont Police Department
P.O. Box 3827
Beaumont, Texas 77704

OR2020-28274

Dear Ms. Hickman:

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# 855311.

The Beaumont Police Department (the "department") received a request for a specified report involving a named individual. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions 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). The department states the submitted information pertains to an active criminal investigation or prosecution. Based on this 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). Thus, section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the submitted information.

However, we note 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). Accordingly, with the exception of basic information, the department may generally withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

However, the requestor is a representative of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "TDCJ") and 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] any criminal history record information ["CHRI"] maintained by the [Texas Department of Public Safety] about a person." See Gov't Code § 411.089(a). In addition, section 411.087(a)(2) of the Government Code provides the following:

- (a) [A] person, agency, department, political subdivision, or other entity that is authorized by this subchapter or Subchapter E-1 to obtain from the [Texas Department of Public Safety] [CHRI] maintained by the [Texas Department of Public Safety] 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). We note 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 information at issue contains CHRI. 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, to the extent the requestor represents a "criminal justice agency," the requestor is authorized to obtain CHRI concerning 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).

The requestor represents a criminal justice agency as defined by section 411.082. However, we are unable to determine whether she intends to use the CHRI at issue for a criminal justice purpose. A statutory right of access prevails over the Act's general exceptions to public disclosure, including section 552.108 of the Government Code. 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 exception to disclosure under the Act). Thus, if the department determines the requestor intends to use the CHRI for a law enforcement purpose, then the department must release the CHRI pursuant to section 411.087(a)(2) of the Government Code. Conversely, if the

department determines the requestor does not intend to use the CHRI for a law enforcement purpose, then the department is not required to the release the CHRI on that ground.

In summary, with the exception of basic information, which must be released, the department may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. However, the department must also release the CHRI if it determines the requestor intends to use the CHRI for a criminal justice purpose.¹

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,

Debbie K. Lee
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DKL/mo

Ref: ID# 855311

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

¹ As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining arguments.