



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 1, 2022

Ms. Courtney Tracy Ponthier  
Criminal District Attorney  
Newton County  
110 East Court Street  
Newton, Texas 75966

OR2022-15691

Dear Ms. Ponthier:

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# 951128.

The Newton County Criminal District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney's office") received two requests from the same requestor for twenty categories of information pertaining to five specified topics.<sup>1</sup> You state you have released some information to the requestor. We understand the district attorney's office does not have some information responsive to certain categories of the request.<sup>2</sup> You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.108 and 552.116 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the requestor asks the district attorney's office to answer questions. The Act does not require a governmental body to answer factual questions, conduct legal research, or create new information in responding to a request. *See* Open Records Decision

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<sup>1</sup> You state the district attorney's office sought and received clarification of the information requested. *See* Gov't Code § 552.222 (providing if request for information is unclear, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify request); *see also* *City of Dallas v. Abbott*, 304 S.W.3d 380, 387 (Tex. 2010) (holding that when a governmental entity, acting in good faith, requests clarification or narrowing of an unclear or overbroad request for information, the ten-day period to request an attorney general ruling is measured from the date the request is clarified or narrowed).

<sup>2</sup> The Act does not require a governmental body that receives a request for information to create information that did not exist when the request was received. *See* *Econ. Opportunities Dev. Corp. v. Bustamante*, 562 S.W.2d 266 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1978, writ dismissed); Open Records Decision Nos. 605 at 2 (1992), 563 at 8 (1990), 555 at 1-2 (1990), 452 at 3 (1986), 362 at 2 (1983).

Nos. 563 at 8 (1990), 555 at 1-2 (1990). However, a governmental body must make a good-faith effort to relate a request to any responsive information that is within its possession or control. Open Records Decision Nos. 561 at 8-9 (1990), 555 at 102. We assume the district attorney's office has made a good-faith effort to do so.

Next, we note some of the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part:

(a) [T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

...

(3) information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the receipt or expenditure of public or other funds by a governmental body[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(3). The submitted information includes information in an account, contract, or voucher relating to the receipt or expenditure of funds by the district attorney's office that is subject to section 552.022(a)(3). This information must be released unless it is made confidential under the Act or other law. *See id.* You seek to withhold the information subject to 552.022(a)(3) under sections 552.108 and 552.116 of the Government Code. However, sections 552.108 and 552.116 are discretionary in nature and do not make information confidential under the Act. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.108 subject to waiver).* Therefore, the district attorney's office may not withhold the information subject to section 552.022(a)(3), which we indicated, under section 552.108 or section 552.116 of the Government Code, and the district attorney's office must release it pursuant to section 552.022 of the Government 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). A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(1) must explain how and why this exception is applicable to the information at issue. *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 information at issue relates to a pending criminal investigation or prosecution. Based upon your representation, we conclude release of the information will 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). Accordingly, we find the district attorney's office may withhold the remaining information not subject to

section 552.022(a)(3) of the Government Code under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.<sup>3</sup>

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,

Joseph Hoggatt  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JWH/mo

Ref: ID# 951128

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

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<sup>3</sup> As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure of the submitted information.