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IN THE MATTER OF	:	DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
	:	
BRANDON STEVENS,	:	CHESTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA
Requester	:	
	:	RIGHT TO KNOW APPEAL
v.	:	
	:	FINAL DETERMINATION
PHOENIXVILLE POLICE	:	
DEPARTMENT,	:	DA-RTKL-A NO. 2015-008
Respondent	:	

INTRODUCTION

On September 18, 2015, Arthur R. Braitman, Esquire, on behalf of Brandon Stevens ("Requester"), filed a right-to-know request with the Phoenixville Police Department ("Respondent"), pursuant to the Right to Know Law ("RTKL"), 65 P.S. § 67.101, *et. seq.* On September 23, 2015, the Respondent granted the request in part and denied the request in part. On October 6, 2015, Requester appealed to the Office of Open Records. Brandon Stevens (Requester) v. Phoenixville Police Department (Respondent), Docket No. AP 2015-2184. On October 29, 2015, Kyle Applegate, Esquire,

issued a final determination, which denied the appeal in part and transferred the remainder of the appeal to the Chester County District Attorney's Office, which received the transfer on November 4, 2015.

For the reasons set forth in this Final Determination, the appeal is **DENIED** and the Respondent is not required to take any further action.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On September 18, 2015, Arthur R. Braitman, Esquire, on behalf of Brandon Stevens ("Requester"), filed a right-to-know request with the Phoenixville Police Department ("Respondent"), pursuant to the Right to Know Law ("RTKL"), 65 P.S. § 67.101, *et. seq.* On September 23, 2015, the Respondent granted the request in part and denied the request in part. On October 6, 2015, Requester appealed to the Office of Open Records. Brandon Stevens (Requester) v. Phoenixville Police Department (Respondent), Docket No. AP 2015-2184.

On October 15, 2015, Respondent filed an Affidavit in response to Requester's appeal to the Office of Open Records:

I, Wm. J. Mossman, being duly sworn according to law depose and state as follows:

1. I am the Chief of Police and a Deputy Right-to-Know Officer for the Borough of Phoenixville.
2. On September 21 of 2015, I received a Right-to-Know request from Mr. Arthur R. Braitman Esq. who was requesting (1) the Police Incident Report (2) any and all video of the beating incident and prior drinking by the assailants (3) any statements by anyone involved in the aforementioned incident, and (4) any

photographs pertaining to this incident. (The assault of Brandon Stevens at Club 212).

3. On the 21st of September, this incident was an ongoing criminal investigation and a work in progress. No charges or arrest(s) had been made yet.

4. On the 21st of September, I responded to Mr. Braitman's request with a letter of denial informing him that the record(s) he was requesting were exempt from other wise "Public Records" under 65 P.S. * 67.708(b) because the records he requested were either the results of a criminal investigation by the Phoenixville Police Department, or were part of an ongoing criminal investigation. (That letter being sent out on 21 September 2015 which is within the time allotted by law for a timely response).

5. On the 23rd of September, I further reviewed the case and decided to provide Mr. Braitman with the initial report of the incident which included Mr. Stevens' statement to the investigating officer. I sent that partial report along with a revised letter of partial denial to Mr. Braitman on 23 September 2015, (which is within the time allotted by law for a timely response) notating the same exemption as listed above in number 4.

6. To conclude, with regard to request #1 - (police Incident Report) Requestor received all but the investigative section of the report he requested which is exempt. With regard to request #2 - (any and all video of the beating incident and prior drinking by the assailants) Requestor was denied the video that we received from the property owner as this too is a record related to an official criminal investigation and is exempt. In addition, the video that the Phoenixville Police Department received from the property owner does not show the actual beating of Mr. Stevens or the prior drinking of the assailants which was specifically requested, so we do not have video containing the images requested. With regard to request #3 - (any statements by anyone involved in the aforementioned incident) Requestor received the initial report which included Mr. Stevens' statements to the investigating officer. His was the only statement taken by the investigating officer so this request was granted. With regard to request #4 - (any photographs

pertaining to this incident) No photographs were taken pertaining to this incident so there are none to give or deny.

October 15, 2015 Affidavit of WM. J. Mossman.

On October 29, 2015, Appeals Officer Kyle Applegate, Esquire, issued a final determination, which denied the appeal in part and transferred the remainder of the appeal to the Chester County District Attorney's Office. The Appeals Officer stated:

On September 18, 2015, Arthur R. Braitman, Esq., on behalf of Brandon Stevens ("Requester"), submitted a request ("Request") to the Borough of Phoenixville Police Department ("Department") pursuant to the Right-to-Know Law ("RTKL"), 65 P.S. §§ 67.101 *et seq.*, seeking records regarding the assault and battery of the Requester, including a police incident report, video, statements, and photographs. The Department partially denied the Request on September 23, 2015, providing an incident report but stating that another incident report ("other report") is related to a criminal investigation. On September 23, 2015, the Department provided the other report, but redacted a portion of the report. On October 6, 2015, the Requester appealed to the Office of Open Records ("OOR").

On appeal, the Department provided the notarized affidavit of William J. Mossman, Chief of Police, who attests that the Department does not possess any responsive videos or photographs. Chief Mossman also attests that the Requester was provided with an incident report containing the Requester's statements to police, and that these statements are the only statements responsive to the Request. Under the RTKL, an attestation made under made under the penalty of perjury may serve as sufficient evidentiary support of the nonexistence of records. See Sherry v. Radnor Twp. Sch. Dist., 20 A.3d 515, 520-21 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2011); Moore v. Office of Open Records, 992 A.2d 907, 909 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2010). Based on the evidence provided, the Department has met its burden of proving that responsive videos and photographs do not exist in its possession, custody, or control. Further, the Department has met its burden of proving that no additional responsive statements exist. Accordingly, the appeal is denied as to these records.

The Department also argues that “the investigative section” of the other report is exempt because it is related to a criminal investigation. *See* 65 P.S. § 67.708(b)(16). The Department is a local law enforcement agency. *See* Sawicki v. Centre County District Attorney’s Office, OOR Dkt. AP 2015-0757, 2015 PA O.O.R.D. LEXIS 885 (*citing* 4 P.S. § 325.211). The OOR does not have jurisdiction to hear appeals related to criminal investigative records held by local law enforcement agencies. *See* 65 P.S. § 67.503(d)(2). Instead, appeals involving records alleged to be criminal investigative records held by a local law enforcement agency are to be heard by an appeals officer designated by the local district attorney. *See id.* Accordingly, the appeal is hereby partially transferred to the Appeals Officer for the Chester County District Attorney’s Office. A copy of this final order and the appeal filed by the Requester will be sent to the Appeals Officer for the Chester County District Attorney’s Office.

For the foregoing reasons, Requester’s appeal is denied in part and transferred in part to Appeals Officer for the Chester County District Attorney’s Office. This Final Determination is binding on all parties. Within thirty days of the mailing date of this Final Determination, either party may appeal to the Chester County Court of Common Pleas. 65 P.S. § 67.1302(a). All parties must be served with notice of the appeal. The OOR also shall be served notice and have an opportunity to respond as per Section 1303 of the RTKL. This Final Determination shall be placed on the OOR website at: <http://openrecords.pa.gov>.

October 29, 2015, Final Determination, Brandon Stevens (Requester) v. Phoenixville Police Department (Respondent), Docket No. AP 2015-2184, at 1-3.

On November 5, 2015, this Appeals Officer for the Chester County District Attorney’s Office gave Notice to the parties of the following:

Unless the Requester agrees otherwise, as the appeals officer, I shall make a final determination, which shall be mailed to the Requester and the Respondent, within 30 days of November 4, 2015, which is December 4, 2015. 65 P.S. § 67.1101(b)(1). If a final determination is not made within 30 days, the appeal is deemed denied by operation of law. 65 P.S. § 67.1101(b)(2). Prior to issuing a final determination, a hearing may be conducted. However, a

hearing is generally not needed to make a final determination. The final determination shall be a final appealable order, and shall include a written explanation of the reason for the decision. 65 P.S. § 67.1101(b)(3).

The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has held that a Respondent is permitted to assert exemptions on appeal, even if the agency did not assert them when the request was originally denied. Levy v. Senate of Pennsylvania, 619 Pa. 586, 65 A.3d 361 (2013).

The Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania has held that, pursuant to 65 P.S. § 67.1101(a), the appeal shall state the grounds upon which the Requester asserts that the record is a public record and shall address any grounds stated by the agency for denying the request. When a Requester fails to state the records sought are public, or fails to address an agency's grounds for denial, the appeal may be dismissed. Padgett v. Pennsylvania State Police, 73 A.3d 644 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2013); Saunders v. Department of Correction, 48 A. 3d 540 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2012); Department of Corrections v. Office of Open Records, 18 A.3d 429 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2011).

If the Respondent wishes to supplement the reasons for the denial of the Right to Know request it must do so on or before November 12, 2015.

If the Requester wishes to submit a response, it must do so on or before November 19, 2015.

Any statements of fact must be supported by an Affidavit made under penalty of perjury by a person with actual knowledge. However, legal arguments and citation to authority do not require Affidavits. All parties must be served with a copy of any responses submitted to this appeal officer.

November 5, 2015 Letter of Chief Deputy District Attorney Nicholas J. Casenta, Jr.

Requester did not submit an additional response. Respondent did not submit an additional response.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

The Chester County District Attorney's Office is authorized to hear appeals relating to access to criminal investigative records in the possession of a local agency located within Chester County. 65 P.S. § 67.503(d)(2) ("The district attorney of a county shall designate one or more appeals officers to hear appeals under Chapter 11 relating to access to criminal investigative records in possession of a local agency of that county. The appeals officer designated by the district attorney shall determine if the record requested is a criminal investigative record.").

The Phoenixville Police Department ("Respondent") is a local agency subject to the RTKL that is required to disclose public documents. 65 P.S. § 67.302. Records of a local agency are presumed "public" unless the record: (1) is exempt under 65 P.S. § 67.708(b); (2) is protected by privilege; or (3) is exempt from disclosure under any other Federal or State law or regulation or judicial order or decree. 65 P.S. § 67.305.

"Nothing in this act shall supersede or modify the public or nonpublic nature of a record or document established in Federal or State law, regulation or judicial order or decree." 65 P.S. § 67.306.

The Respondent bears the burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the document requested is exempt from public access. 65 P.S. § 67.708(a)(1).¹ There is sufficient evidence to support the determination that the documents requested are criminal investigative records and exempt from disclosure.

¹ A preponderance of the evidence, means, by a greater weight of the evidence. Commonwealth v. Brown, 567 Pa. 272, 284, 786 A.2d 961, 968 (2001). "A

The RTKL provides that records of an agency relating to or resulting in a criminal investigation, such as investigative materials, notes, correspondence, videos, reports, and records, may be withheld as exempt. 65 P.S. § 67.708(b), titled, “Exceptions for public records”, provides in part as follows:

(b) Exceptions. -- Except as provided in subsections (c) and (d), the following are exempt from access by a requester under this act:

...

(16) A record of an agency relating to or resulting in a criminal investigation, including:

(i) Complaints of potential criminal conduct other than a private criminal complaint.

(ii) Investigative materials, notes, correspondence, videos and reports.

(iii) A record that includes the identity of a confidential source or the identity of a suspect who has not been charged with an offense to whom confidentiality has been promised.

(iv) A record that includes information made confidential by law or court order.

(v) Victim information, including any information that would jeopardize the safety of the victim.

(vi) A record that, if disclosed, would do any of the following:

‘preponderance of the evidence’ is defined as ‘the greater weight of the evidence ... evidence that has the most convincing force; superior evidentiary weight that, though not sufficient to free the mind wholly from all reasonable doubt, is still sufficient to incline a fair and impartial mind to one side of the issue rather than the other....’ Black’s Law Dictionary 1301 (9th ed. 2009).” *Mitchell v. Office of Open Records*, 997 A.2d 1262, 1264 n.3 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2010); *See also Commonwealth v. Williams*, 532 Pa. 265, 284-286, 615 A.2d 716, 726 (1992) (preponderance of the evidence in essence is proof that something is more likely than not).

(A) Reveal the institution, progress or result of a criminal investigation, except the filing of criminal charges.

(B) Deprive a person of the right to a fair trial or an impartial adjudication.

(C) Impair the ability to locate a defendant or codefendant.

(D) Hinder an agency's ability to secure an arrest, prosecution or conviction.

(E) Endanger the life or physical safety of an individual.

This paragraph shall not apply to information contained in a police blotter as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 9102 (relating to definitions) and utilized or maintained by the Pennsylvania State Police, local, campus, transit or port authority police department or other law enforcement agency or in a traffic report except as provided under 75 Pa.C.S. § 3754(b)(relating to accident prevention investigations).

65 P.S. § 67.708(b).

18 Pa.C.S.A. § 9102 (relating to definitions) states in part: **“Investigative information.”** Information assembled as a result of the performance of any inquiry, formal or informal, into a criminal incident or an allegation of criminal wrongdoing and may include modus operandi information.”

In Pennsylvania State Police v. Office of Open Records, 5 A.3d 473 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2010), the *en banc* Commonwealth Court found an incident report exempt from disclosure pursuant to 65 P.S. § 67.708(b)(16). The Court held that the incident report was not a public record because the incident report was not the equivalent of a police blotter under the RTKL and the Criminal History Records Information Act (“CHRIA”). The incident report contained notes of interviews with the alleged victims /

perpetrators, as well as another witness. This information contained within the incident report was assembled as a result of an investigation into a criminal incident or an allegation of criminal wrongdoing. Consequently, the incident report was not a public record subject to disclosure. The Court also held that a victim's name and address is "victim information," *i.e.* information about the victim, and that the unwanted disclosure of a victim's name may prove to be a second victimization, whether due to retaliation, the fear of retaliation, stigma, embarrassment, or other reasons.

Police interviews of suspects, victims, and others witness, along with photographs, are the most traditional form of criminal investigation. Pursuant to 65 P.S. § 67.708(b)(16), records of an agency are exempt from access by a requester if the records relate to or result in a criminal investigation. When a party seeks to challenge an agency's refusal to release information by appealing that party must address any grounds stated by the agency for denying the request. Department of Corrections v. Office of Open Records, 18 A.3d 429, 434 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2011); Padgett v. Pennsylvania State Police, 73 A.3d 644, 647-648 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2013).

In Department of Corrections v. Office of Open Records, 18 A.3d 429 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2011), the Commonwealth Court stated in part:

Consequently, we agree with DOC that when a party seeks to challenge an agency's refusal to release information by appealing to Open Records, that party must "address any grounds stated by the agency for ... denying the request." This is a typical requirement in any process that aims to provide a forum for error correction. We do not see it as a particularly onerous requirement, whether the requester has the benefit of legal counsel or is *pro se*.

DOC v. OOR at 434. The Requester has not stated why the requested document does not fall under the asserted exemption and is subject to access.

A requester's identity and motivation for making a request is not relevant, and his or her intended use for the information may not be grounds for granting or denying a request. *See* 65 P.S. § 67.301(b), 65 P.S. § 67.703. In DiMartino v. Pennsylvania State Police, 2011 WL 10841570 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2011), the Commonwealth Court, in a memorandum opinion,² stated in part:

As a final point, we note that, the requester's status as representative of Decedent's family has no bearing on whether the requested records are accessible through a RTKL request. We agree with the OOR that the RTKL must be construed without regard to the requester's identity. *See, e.g.*, Section 301(b) of the RTKL, 65 P.S. § 67.301(b) (stating that an agency "may not deny a requester access to a public record due to the intended use of the public record by the requester unless otherwise provided by law"); Weaver v. Dep't of Corr., 702 A.2d 370 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1997) (under the former Right-to-Know Act, the right to examine a public record is not based on whether the person requesting the disclosure is affected by the records or if her motives are pure in seeking them, but whether any person's rights are fixed); Furin v. Pittsburgh Sch. Dist., OOR Dkt. No. AP 2010-0181, 2010 PA OORD LEXIS 212 (Pa. OOR 2010) (finding records exempt under Section 708(b) regardless of status of person requesting them); Wheelock v. Dep't of Corr., OOR Dkt. No. AP 2009-0997, 2009 PA OORD LEXIS 725 (Pa. OOR 2009) (stating the only information available under the RTKL is a "public record" available to all citizens regardless of personal status or stake in requested information).

DiMartino at *6 (footnote omitted). *See also* Mahoney v. Pennsylvania State Police, 339 C.D. 2011, 2011 WL 10841247 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2011).

² DiMartino v. Pennsylvania State Police, 340 C.D. 2011, 2011 WL 10841570 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2011) is an unreported panel decision of the Commonwealth Court. As such, it may be cited for its persuasive value, but not as binding precedent. *See* Section 414 of the Commonwealth Court's Internal Operating Procedures.

In Hunsicker v. Pennsylvania State Police, 93 A.3d 911 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2014), Requester (Hunsicker) appealed a Determination of the Office of Open Records denying her request under the RTKL for access to Pennsylvania State Police records regarding an investigation surrounding her brother's death, which involved a State Trooper. In affirming the denial, the Commonwealth Court stated in part:

Requestor appealed the PSP's denial to the OOR contending that she lived with her brother for 35 years, that she was not a member of the general public but his sister, and that she should have special access to the information. The OOR denied her appeal because it failed to address agency grounds for denial of access and the appeal did not challenge the confidentiality of the records under CHRIA. This appeal followed.

On appeal, Requestor first contends that the materials she is requesting are referred to as an "incident" report, not an "investigative" report, implying that those records fall outside of the investigative exemption. An incident report normally refers to a report filed by the responding officers, not the entire investigative file, although, here, it appears that the investigative report was filed at the incident report number. In any event, no matter what is contained in an incident report, incident reports are considered investigative materials and are covered by that exemption. Pennsylvania State Police v. Office of Open Records, 5 A.3d 473, 479 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2010), *appeal denied*, [621] Pa. [685], 76 A.3d 540 (2013).

Even if the requested records fall within the investigative exception, Requestor contends that she is entitled to those records because she has a special need for them because, as Mr. Rotkewicz's sister, she needs to know what her brother did to cause a PSP Trooper to shoot him and to investigate a possible PSP "cover up." While we are sympathetic to Requestor's desire to understand her brother's death, her status as his sister and her reasons for requesting the records do not render records that fall within the investigative exemption accessible. Under the RTKL, whether the document is accessible is based only on whether a document is a public record, and, if so, whether it falls within an exemption that allows that it not be disclosed. The status of the

individual requesting the record and the reason for the request, good or bad, are irrelevant as to whether a document must be made accessible under Section 301(b). *See* 65 P.S. § 67.301(b) (stating that an agency “may not deny a requester access to a public record due to the intended use of the public record by the requester unless otherwise provided by law.”).

As a corollary to this argument, Requestor contends that the investigative file should be made accessible because portions of the withheld documents are already known to her, and that if any of the record contains information that falls within an exemption to disclosure, that information should be redacted and the records then be given to her. Again, for the reasons stated above, just because she purportedly knows some of the information contained in the documents is irrelevant as to whether a document must be made accessible. Moreover, her request that the documents be redacted to the extent the records contain exempt information is based on a premise that only certain information is exempt from disclosure when, under the investigative exemption, the entire investigative report falls within the investigative exemption. 65 P.S. § 67.706(b)(16); *see also* Pennsylvania State Police.

Finally Requestor contends that the PSP Trooper who investigated the incident assured her that she would receive that information. Even assuming that the assertion is true, an individual State Trooper does not have the authority to authorize the release of documents or make PSP RTKL determinations pursuant to Section 1102, 65 P.S. § 67.1102.

Hunsicker v. Pennsylvania State Police at 913-914 (footnote omitted).

In Barros v. Martin, 92 A.3d 1243 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2014), *appeal denied*, ___ Pa. ___, 97

A.3d 745 (2014), the Commonwealth Court stated in part:

Thus, if a record, on its face, relates to a criminal investigation, it is exempt under the RTKL pursuant to Section 708(b)(16)(ii). *See* Coley v. Philadelphia Dist. Attorney’s Office, 77 A.3d 694, 697 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2013); Mitchell v. Office of Open Records, 997 A.2d 1262, 1264 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2010). Criminal investigative records remain exempt from disclosure under the RTKL even after the investigation is completed. Sullivan v. City of Pittsburgh, Dep’t of Pub. Safety, 127 Pa. Cmwlth. 339, 561 A.2d 863, 865 (1989).

Also, a record is not considered a public record under Section 102 of the RTKL if it is “exempt under any other State or Federal Law,” including the CHRIA. See Coley, 77 A.3d at 697. Section 9106(c)(4) of the CHRIA, 18 Pa.C.S. § 9106(c)(4), provides that “investigative and treatment information shall not be disseminated to any department, agency or individual unless the department, agency or individual requesting the information is a criminal justice agency.” The CHRIA defines “investigative information” as “information assembled as a result of the performance of any inquiry, formal or informal, into a criminal incident or an allegation of criminal wrongdoing and may include modus operandi information.” Section 9102 of the CHRIA, 18 Pa.C.S. § 9102.

Thus, the records requested by Barros - *i.e.*, the criminal complaint file, forensic lab reports, any confession and record of polygraph of Quinones, the “Communication Center Incident Review,” the “Internal Police Wanted Notice,” “Reports on individual mistakenly apprehended,” and three signed witness statements - are protected from disclosure under both the RTKL and the CHRIA as records “relating to ... a criminal investigation” and “investigative information,” respectively.

Barros v. Martin at 1250.

In Padgett v. Pennsylvania State Police, 73 A.3d 644 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2013), the

Commonwealth Court stated in part:

Pursuant to Section 1101(a) of the RTKL, “[t]he appeal shall state the grounds upon which the requester asserts that the record is a public record ... and shall address any grounds stated by the agency for delaying or denying the request.” 65 P.S. § 67.1101(a). When a requester fails to state the records sought are public, or fails to address an agency’s grounds for denial, the OOR properly dismisses the appeal. See Saunders v. Dep’t of Corr., 48 A. 3d 540 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2012) (affirming OOR dismissal); Dep’t of Corr. v. Office of Open Records, 18 A.3d 429 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2011) (holding an appeal that fails to sufficiently specify the reasons for appeal should be dismissed rather than addressed by OOR).

In Department of Corrections, we outlined the sufficiency requirements for an appeal under Section 1101(a) of the RTKL. At a

minimum, a requester's appeal "must address any grounds stated by the agency ... for denying the request." Dep't of Corr., 18 A.3d at 434. We reasoned a minimally sufficient appeal is a condition precedent for OOR to consider a requester's challenge to an agency denial.

More recently, in Saunders, we explained Section 1101(a) of the RTKL requires a requester "to state why the records did not fall under the asserted exemptions and, thus, were public records subject to access." Id. at 543 (agency's citation to various subsections of the RTKL, without explanation or application of exceptions, triggers requester's burden to address exemption). Because Saunders failed to address the exemptions, we affirmed OOR's dismissal of the appeal.

In this case, Requester did not state the records are public, or address the exemptions PSP cited in its response and verification. Requester stated merely that the RTKL exceptions do not apply without further explication. That does not satisfy the requirements of Section 1101(a) as we interpret that provision. Id.

Requester also did not address the agency's cited exemptions pertaining to the police report. Most notably, Requester did not discuss CHRIA, which pertains to criminal records. In fact, when he explained the reason he sought the records, Requester described them as criminal investigation records.

Requester emphasized he is entitled to the records as a party involved in the criminal investigation to which his Request relates. However, a requester's motivation for making a request is not relevant, and his intended use for the information may not be grounds for denial. *See* Section 301(b) of the RTKL, 65 P.S. § 67.301(b); Section 703 of the RTKL, 65 P.S. § 67.703. An explanation of why a requester believes an agency should disclose records to him does not satisfy the requirement in Section 1101(a) to explain why the requested records are public and available to everyone. To the contrary, Requester's explanation underscores PSP's criminal investigative defenses here.

We make no decision regarding Requester's alleged entitlement to the records under an alternate legal mechanism. Entitlement does not arise under the RTKL through which citizens have a right to access public records "open to the entire public at large." *See, e.g.,*

Coulter v. Pa. Bd. of Prob. & Parole, 48 A.3d 516, 519 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2012) (“home plans” of parolee requester are not accessible to her under RTKL though she is subject of records; to be accessible under the RTKL, identity of the requester is irrelevant).

Padgett at 647-648 (footnote omitted).

As in Padgett, this decision does not involve whether or not Requester would be entitled to these criminal investigative records under an alternate legal mechanism. This decision only involves the RTKL.

The RTKL provides that records of an agency relating to or resulting in a criminal investigation may be withheld as exempt. 65 P.S. § 67.708(b). The Respondent bears the burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the documents requested are exempt from public access. 65 P.S. § 67.708(a)(1). There is sufficient evidence to support the determination that the documents requested are criminal investigative records and exempt from disclosure.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the appeal is **DENIED**, and the Respondent is not required to take any further action. This Final Determination is binding on all parties. Within thirty (30) days of the mailing date of this Final Determination, any party may petition for review, to the Chester County Court of Common Pleas, pursuant to 65 P.S. § 67.1302(a). All parties must be served with a copy of the petition for review. The Chester County District Attorney’s Office shall also be served with a copy of the petition for review, pursuant to 65 P.S. § 67.1303(a), for the purpose of transmitting the

record to the reviewing court. See East Stroudsburg University Foundation v. Office of Open Records, 995 A.2d 496, 507 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2010).

FINAL DETERMINATION ISSUED AND MAILED ON: November 30, 2015

APPEALS OFFICER:

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INDEX OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX "A" October 29, 2015 Letter and Attachments of
Charles Rees Brown, Esquire, Chief Counsel
Transferring Appeal Proceedings from Office of Open Records

APPENDIX "B" November 5, 2015 Letter of CDDA Nicholas J. Casenta, Jr., Esquire
Appeals Officer for District Attorney's Office of Chester County