



Office of the Attorney General
State of Texas

DAN MORALES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

June 10, 1992

Mr. Jeff Hankins
Legal Assistant
Program Division, Legal Services, 110-1C
Texas Department of Insurance
P. O. Box 149104
Austin, Texas 78714-9104

OR92-320

Dear Mr. Hankins:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Texas Open Records Act, article 6252-17a, V.T.C.S. Your request was assigned ID# 15627.

You have received a request for information in the possession of the Texas Department of Insurance (the "department") relating to complaints filed against Allstate Insurance, Commercial Union Insurance Company, Horace Mann Insurance Company, Texas Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Company, and Northwestern National County Mutual Insurance Company. Specifically, the requestor seeks "all complaints from consumers and independent auto glass shops from September 1, 1991 to date to the effect that some insurers were requiring claimants to take their cars to specific glass dealers." You claim that the requested information relates to anticipated litigation with these insurance companies and is therefore excepted from required public disclosure by section 3(a)(3) of the Open Records Act. You also claim that portions of the requested information are excepted by sections 3(a)(1), 3(a)(7), and 3(a)(11).

Section 3(a)(3) excepts

information relating to litigation of a criminal or civil nature and settlement negotiations, to which the state or political subdivision is, or may be, a party, or to which an officer or employee of the state or political subdivision, as a consequence of his office or employment, is or may be a party, that the attorney general or the respective attorneys of the various

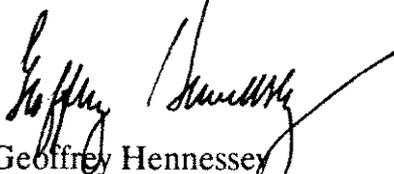
political subdivisions has determined should be withheld from public inspection.

Section 3(a)(3) applies only when litigation in a specific matter is pending or reasonably anticipated and only to information clearly relevant to that litigation. Open Records Decision No. 551 (1990). The litigation exception may be applied to records relating to a contested case before an administrative agency subject to the Administrative Procedure and Texas Register Act (APTRA) V.T.C.S., article 6252-13a. Open Records Decision Nos. 588 (1991); 368 (1983). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 452 (1986) at 4.

Article 1.33(a) of the Insurance Code provides that the department is generally subject to the APTRA. You advise us that the requested information relates to an investigation of the above named insurance companies and that the department anticipates that the investigation will culminate in a contested administrative case subject to APTRA with the named companies as parties. Accordingly, we conclude that litigation may be reasonably anticipated. You indicate that the attorney representing the department has determined that the requested documents relate to the anticipated litigation. We agree. Therefore, the requested information may be withheld from required public disclosure under section 3(a)(3) of the Open Records Act. Please note that this ruling applies only until the resolution of the matter and to the documents at issue here. As we resolve this matter under section 3(a)(3), we need not address the applicability of sections 3(a)(1), 3(a)(7), and 3(a)(11) at this time.

Because case law and prior published open records decisions resolve your request, we are resolving this matter with this informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. If you have questions about this ruling, please refer to OR92-320.

Yours very truly,


Geoffrey Hennessey
Assistant Attorney General
Opinion Committee