



Office of the Attorney General
State of Texas

DAN MORALES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

March 30, 1998

Mr. Hugh W. Davis, Jr.
Assistant City Attorney
City of Fort Worth
1000 Throckmorton Street
Fort Worth, Texas 76102-6311

OR98-0823

Dear Mr. Davis:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Texas Open Records Act, chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 114005.

The City of Fort Worth (the "city") received a request for a specific letter relating to the termination of the city's former assistant director of public events. You state that the requestor has withdrawn her request for the material attached to the letter. However, you claim that the letter is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

When asserting section 552.103(a), a governmental body must establish that the requested information relates to pending or reasonably anticipated litigation.¹ Thus, under section 552.103(a) a governmental body's burden is two-pronged. The governmental body must establish that (1) litigation is either pending or reasonably anticipated, and that (2) the requested information relates to that litigation. *See Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.--Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 (1990) at 4.

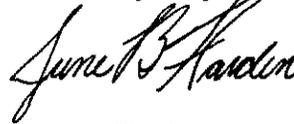
¹Section 552.103(a) excepts from required public disclosure information:

- (1) relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature or settlement negotiations, to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party; and
- (2) that the attorney general or the attorney of the political subdivision has determined should be withheld from public inspection.

To establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated, a governmental body must provide this office "concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture." Open Records Decision No. 452 (1986) at 4. Concrete evidence to support a claim that litigation is reasonably anticipated may include, for example, the governmental body's receipt of a letter containing a specific threat to sue the governmental body from an attorney for a potential opposing party.² Open Records Decision No. 555 (1990); *see* Open Records Decision No. 518 (1989) at 5 (litigation must be "realistically contemplated"). On the other hand, this office has determined that if an individual publicly threatens to bring suit against a governmental body, but does not actually take objective steps toward filing suit, litigation is not reasonably anticipated. *See* Open Records Decision No. 331 (1982). Nor does the mere fact that a potential opposing party hires an attorney who makes a request for information establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated. Open Records Decision No. 361 (1983) at 2. Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 452 (1986) at 4. In this instance, we do not believe that the city has shown that litigation is reasonably anticipated. Thus, you must release the letter to the requestor.

We are resolving this matter with an informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. This ruling is limited to the particular records at issue under the facts presented to us in this request and should not be relied on as a previous determination regarding any other records. If you have any questions regarding this ruling, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,



June B. Harden
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JBH/ghg

Ref.: ID# 114005

Enclosures: Submitted documents

²In addition, this office has concluded that litigation was reasonably anticipated when the potential opposing party took the following objective steps toward litigation: hired an attorney who made a demand for disputed payments and threatened to sue if the payments were not made promptly, *see* Open Records Decision No. 346 (1982); filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *see* Open Records Decision No. 336 (1982); and threatened to sue on several occasions and hired an attorney, *see* Open Records Decision No. 288 (1981).

cc: Ms. Kristin N. Sullivan
Reporter
Fort Worth Star-Telegram
P.O. Box 1870
Fort Worth, Texas 76102
(w/o enclosures)