



April 24, 2000

Mr. Joe De Los Santos
Walsh, Anderson, Brown, Schulze & Aldridge, P.C.
P.O. Box 460606
San Antonio, Texas 78246-0606

OR2000-1587

Dear Mr. De Los Santos:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID#134608.

The Northside Independent School District (the "district") received a request for copies of certain records regarding an investigation of sexual discrimination and harassment. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.107 and 552.131 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, you contend that the requested information may be withheld under section 552.103 of the Government Code. Section 552.103(a), the "litigation exception," excepts from disclosure information relating to litigation to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party. The governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show that the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *University of Tex. Law Sch. v. Texas Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479 (Tex. App.--Austin, 1997, no pet.); *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 at 4 (1990). The city must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

The mere chance of litigation will not trigger section 552.103(a). Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). To demonstrate that litigation is reasonably anticipated, the governmental body must furnish *concrete* evidence that litigation involving a specific matter is realistically contemplated and is more than mere conjecture. *Id.* Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986).

You inform this office that an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) investigation is currently pending. You have provided a copy of the EEOC Notice of Charge of Discrimination for our review. This office has stated that a pending EEOC complaint indicates litigation is reasonably anticipated. Open Records Decision Nos. 386 at 2 (1983), 336 at 1 (1982). Based on your arguments and the information before us, we conclude that you have shown that litigation is reasonably anticipated. Furthermore, we find that the requested information relates to the anticipated litigation. Thus, you may withhold most of the requested information pursuant to section 552.103(a).

The potential opposing party filed the EEOC Notice of Charge of Discrimination and provided the district with a statement. This office has held that once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information and such information must be disclosed. Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Therefore, you must release to the requestor the documents the potential opposing party has created.¹ In addition, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation concludes.² Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

Because section 552.103 is dispositive of your request, we do not address your other arguments against public disclosure. This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

¹In this instance, we note that section 552.023 of the Government Code provides a person a special right of access to records held by a governmental body that contain information relating to the person that is protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect that person’s privacy interests.

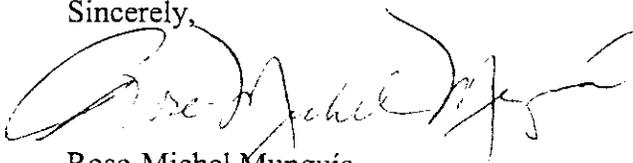
² We caution that some of the information may be confidential by law. Therefore, if the district receives a request in the future, at a time when litigation is no longer reasonably anticipated or pending, the district should seek a ruling from this office on the other exceptions raised before releasing any of the requested information. See Gov’t Code § 552.352 (distribution of confidential information may constitute criminal offense).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Rose-Michel Munguía
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RMM/ljp

Ref: ID# 134608

Encl. Submitted documents

bcc: Ms. Etta J. Hurd
8750 Timberwilde
San Antonio Texas 78250
(w/o enclosures)