



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 8, 2004

Mr. Edward Seidenberg
Assistant State Librarian
Texas State Library and Archives Commission
P. O. Box 12927
Austin, Texas 78711-2927

OR2004-9502

Dear Mr. Seidenberg:

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# 212478.

The Texas State Library and Archives Commission (the "commission") received a request for information in the records of former Governor George W. Bush concerning tort reform. You state that some of the requested information will be made available to the requestor. You have submitted the remaining requested information to this office for review. At the request of the Office of the Governor (the "governor"), you raise sections 552.106 and 552.111 of the Government Code, but take no position as to the applicability of these exceptions. The governor contends that sections 552.106 and 552.111 except the submitted information from disclosure in its entirety. We have considered the exceptions raised and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.111 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure "an interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency." The purpose of this exception is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990). In Open Records Decision No. 615 (1993), this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined that section 552.111 excepts only those internal communications that consist of advice,

recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also* *City of Garland v. The Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (Gov't Code § 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995). Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events that are severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 5. If, however, the factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information may also be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

The governor asserts that all of the submitted documents, Attachments A through D, consist of advice, opinions, and recommendations of the former governor's staff. The governor further asserts that the former governor used these documents to assess policy issues on an ongoing basis and assist him in deciding what, if any, action he should take on the issues. Having carefully reviewed Attachments A through D, we agree that most of the information in these documents consists of advice, opinions, and recommendations relating to a policymaking issue and may therefore be withheld from disclosure under section 552.111. However, we have marked severable factual information in Attachments A, C, and D that is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.111.

Section 552.106 excepts from public disclosure "[a] draft or working paper involved in the preparation of proposed legislation[.]" Gov't Code § 552.106(a). Section 552.106 resembles section 552.111 in that both of these exceptions protect advice, opinion, and recommendation on policy matters, in order to encourage frank discussion during the policymaking process. *See* Open Records Decision No. 460 at 3 (1987). However, section 552.106 applies specifically to the legislative process and thus is narrower than section 552.111. *Id.* The purpose of section 552.106 is to encourage frank discussion on policy matters between the subordinates or advisors of a legislative body and the members of the legislative body. *Id.* at 2. Therefore, section 552.106 is applicable only to the policy judgments, recommendations, and proposals of persons who are involved in the preparation of proposed legislation and who have an official responsibility to provide such information to members of the legislative body. *Id.* at 1; *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 429 at 5 (1985) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.106 not applicable to information relating to governmental entity's efforts to persuade other governmental entities to enact particular ordinances), 367 at 2 (1983) (statutory predecessor applicable to recommendations of executive committee of State Board of Public Accountancy for possible amendments to Public Accountancy Act). Furthermore, section 552.106 does not protect purely factual

information from public disclosure. *See* Open Records Decision No. 460 at 2; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 344 at 3-4 (1982) (for purposes of statutory predecessor, factual information prepared by State Property Tax Board did not reflect policy judgments, recommendations, or proposals concerning drafting of legislation). However, a comparison or analysis of factual information prepared to support proposed legislation is within the scope of section 552.106. *See* Open Records Decision No. 460 at 2.

The only information at issue under section 552.106 is severable factual information in Attachments C and D that is not protected by section 552.111. This factual information does not reflect policy judgments or recommendations and is not part of a comparison or analysis of factual information prepared to support proposed legislation. Therefore, we find that the factual information in Attachments C and D is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.106.

In summary, the marked factual information in Attachments A, C, and D must be released. The commission may withhold the remaining information in Attachments A, C, and D, and all information in Attachment B from disclosure under section 552.111.

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).

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 Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. 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,



Karen Hattaway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KEH/krl

Ref: ID# 212478

Enc. Submitted documents

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(w/o enclosures)

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