



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 30, 2005

Mr. Eddie Martin
Assistant City Attorney
City of Denton
215 East McKinney
Denton, Texas 76201

OR2005-05819

Dear Mr. Martin:

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# 227302.

The City of Denton (the "city") received a request for all documentation, correspondence and memoranda pertaining to the requestor, specifically including correspondence between the city and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The requestor clarified that he did not seek any social security numbers or personal family information. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.117 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information. We have also considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides in relevant part as follows:

¹ Although you assert section 552.1175 of the Government Code, we note that section 552.1175 applies only to peace officers as those are defined by Article 2.12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, county jailers, employees of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and commissioned security officers. *See* Gov't Code § 552.1175(a). You indicate that the information at issue pertains to current city employees. Therefore, please note that section 552.117 is the proper exception to raise.

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature 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.

...

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Gov't Code § 552.103(a), (c). A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents sufficient to establish the applicability of section 552.103 to the information that it seeks to withhold. To meet this burden, the governmental body must demonstrate: (1) that litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date of its receipt of the request for information *and* (2) that the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Thomas v. Cornyn*, 71 S.W.3d 473, 487 (Tex. App.—Austin 2002, no pet.); *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). Both elements of the test must be met in order for information to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.103. *See* Open Records Decision No. 647 at 2 (1996).

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. *Id.*

You indicate, and provide documentation showing, that the requestor filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC") alleging discrimination prior to the date on which the city received this request for information. Based on the information you have provided, we conclude that you have shown that litigation was reasonably anticipated when the city received this request. *See, e.g.,* Open Records Decision Nos. 386 at 2 (1983), 336 at 1 (1982) (pending EEOC complaint indicates litigation is reasonably anticipated). In addition, we agree that the submitted information is related to the anticipated litigation for purposes of section 552.103(a). Thus, you have demonstrated the applicability of section 552.103.

Generally, however, 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. Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to the opposing party in the anticipated litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a), and it must be disclosed. In this instance, it appears that the requestor has previously had access to some of the requested records. Accordingly, while most of the submitted information may be withheld under section 552.103, any information that has been previously seen by the requestor may not be withheld under this exception, and must be released.² As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against 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).

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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

² We note that the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has been concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

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,



Lauren E. Kleine
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LEK/seg

Ref: ID# 227302

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Maverick Thigpen
P.O. Box 703824
Dallas, Texas 75730
(w/o enclosures)