



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

GREG ABBOTT

March 3, 2008

Mr. Steven M. Peña, Sr.
Law Offices of Davidson & Troilo
7550 West IH-10, Suite 800
San Antonio, Texas 78229-5815

OR2008-02853

Dear Mr. Peña:

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# 303487.

The City of Helotes (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for the dashboard camera audio and video recording related to a specified traffic stop. You claim that the submitted information is not subject to the Act. In the alternative, you claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

The Act does not apply to records of the judiciary. Gov't Code § 552.003(1)(B). You state that the submitted information is part of a case currently pending in municipal court, and thus "is or may likely be categorized as records of the municipal court." However, upon review of the submitted information, we note that it consists solely of law enforcement records created by the city's police department. The fact that the Municipal Court may also have a copy of this information does not, in itself, make the information records of the judiciary. Based on our review of the submitted information, we determine that the city has failed to establish that the submitted law enforcement records were collected, assembled, or maintained by or for the judiciary. Accordingly, the submitted information is subject to the Act, and we will address your argument against disclosure.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides:

- (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 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 was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (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). A governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

You state that the requested information relates to pending litigation because the information pertains to a criminal case currently pending in municipal court. Based upon your representation, we conclude that litigation was pending when the city received the request. You also state that the submitted information, which consists of a police vehicle dashboard camera audio and video recording, is related to the pending litigation because the litigation is based on the traffic stop recorded in the submitted information. Thus, we conclude that the submitted information is related to the pending litigation for the purposes of section 552.103. Therefore, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

We note that once the information at issue has been obtained by all parties to the pending litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to the information. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, any information at issue that has either been obtained from or provided to all opposing parties in the pending litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a) and must be disclosed. Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has concluded. *See* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

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 file suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, 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 challenge 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 Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,



Leah B. Wingerson
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LBW/eeg

Ref: ID# 303487

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Jordan Ghawi
c/o Mr. Steven M. Peña, Sr.
Law Offices of Davidson & Troilo
7550 West IH-10, Suite 800
San Antonio, Texas 78229-5815
(w/o enclosures)