



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 12, 2008

Ms. Amy L. Sims
Assistant City Attorney
City of Lubbock
P.O. Box 2000
Lubbock, Texas 79457

OR2008-06429

Dear Ms. Sims:

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# 309758.

The City of Lubbock (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to a specified meeting. You claim that portions of the submitted information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.137¹ of the Government Code.² You also state that the city believes a portion of the information may involve the proprietary interests of third parties. Accordingly, you inform us, and provide documentation showing, that pursuant to section 552.305 of the Government Code, the city notified BlueCross Blue Shield of Texas and American Administrative Group of the request for information and of their right to submit arguments explaining why the contract should not be released. *See Gov't Code* § 552.305 (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body

¹Although you raise section 552.136 of the Government Code, based on your arguments, we understand you to raise section 552.137 of the Government Code.

²Although you also raise sections 552.101, 552.107, 552.111, and 552.117 of the Government Code as exceptions to disclosure of the requested information, you have provided no arguments regarding the applicability of those exceptions; we therefore assume that you no longer urge these exceptions. *See Gov't Code* §§ 552.301(b), (e); .302.

to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in certain circumstances). We have received arguments from American Administrative Group. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted sample of information.

Section 552.103 of the Governmental Code provides as follows:

(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).

The question of whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. See Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). To establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated, a governmental body must provide this office with "concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture." *Id.* This office has concluded that a governmental body's receipt of a claim letter that it represents to be in compliance with the notice requirements of the Texas Tort Claims Act, chapter 101 of the Civil Practice and Remedies Code, is sufficient to establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated. If that representation is not made, the receipt of the claim letter is a factor that we will consider in determining, from the totality of the circumstances presented, whether the governmental body has established that litigation is reasonably anticipated. See Open Records Decision No. 638 at 4 (1996).

You state that the notice at issue, which you have submitted to this office, meets the requirements of the Texas Tort Claims Act and was received by the city prior to its receipt of this request for information. You also inform us that the submitted information consists of communications and documents that pertain to the events giving rise to the claims at issue in the notice letter. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted notice of claim and responsive information, we conclude that the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103.

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 must be disclosed. Further, 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). Because our determination on this issue 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 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,



Justin D. Gordon
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JDG/jh

Ref: ID# 309758

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Dan Hurley
1805 13th Street
Lubbock, Texas 79401
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Neil Horn
Ms. Janet Truesdell-Pennington
BlueCross BlueShield of Texas
2505 Lakeview, Suite 204
Amarillo, Texas 79109
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. L. Darlene Mitchell
Attorney for American Administrative Group, Inc.
Burt Barr & Associates, L.L.P.
P.O. Box 223667
Dallas, Texas 75222-3667
(w/o enclosures)