



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 1, 2008

Mr. Chris Jones
Senior Counsel
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Ave.
Austin, Texas 78701-1494

OR2008-08882

Dear Mr. Jones:

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# 314965.

The Texas Education Agency (the "agency") received a request for all information relating to a specified charter school during a specified time period.¹ You state that you will release two responsive complaints to the requestor. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.²

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

¹The requested records are held by the agency because, effective September 1, 2005, all administrative functions, staff, and resources of the State Board for Educator Certification were transferred to the agency.

²We assume that the representative sample of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach and, therefore, does not authorize the withholding of any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

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). The agency 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. *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.*, 684S.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 agency must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under 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 "concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture." *Id.* In the context of anticipated litigation by a governmental body, the concrete evidence must at least reflect that litigation is "realistically contemplated." See Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989); see also Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982) (finding that investigatory file may be withheld from disclosure if governmental body attorney determines that it should be withheld pursuant to section 552.103 and that litigation is "reasonably likely to result").

In this instance, you state that prior to the instant request, the agency had an open investigation regarding allegations against an educator employed by the specified charter school that may lead the agency to issue sanctions against the educator. We understand the agency may sanction teachers pursuant to section 21.041(b) of the Education Code. See Educ. Code § 21.041(b)(7) (agency may conduct disciplinary proceedings against certified educators, including suspension or revocation of their educator certificate); see also *id.* § 21.031(a) (agency is responsible for regulating and overseeing all aspects of certification and standards of conduct for public school educators); 19 T.A.C. §§ 249.4(a)(1), 249.15. You state that the submitted documents are contained in an open investigation file the agency has prepared in this matter. You further explain that, the agency has "a statutory responsibility to pursue sanctions in this matter and because the educator has not admitted to the underlying basis of the complaint, it is likely that this matter will be referred to the

State Office of Administrative Hearings for a contested case hearing under the Administrative Procedures Act ["APA"].” See 19 T.A.C. § 249.18(a); See also Educ. Code § 21.041(b)(7); Open Records Decision No. 588 (1991) (contested case under APA constitutes litigation for purposes of statutory predecessor to section 552.103). Based on your representations and our review, we determine that the agency reasonably anticipated litigation on the date that it received this request for information. Furthermore, upon review, we find that the submitted information relates to the anticipated litigation. Accordingly, we conclude that section 552.103 is applicable and the agency may withhold the submitted information pursuant to section 552.103.

We note, however, that once the information has been obtained by all parties to the pending litigation, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision No. 349 at 2 (1982). We also note that the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends when the litigation has concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 at 2; Open Records Decision Nos. 350 at 3 (1982), 349 at 2 (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). If the governmental body does not file suit over 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,



Laura E. Ream
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LER/jb

Ref: ID# 314965

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. James Dodd
4300 MacArthur Avenue, Suite 160
Dallas, Texas 75209
(w/o enclosures)