



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 25, 2008

Ms. Kimberly R. Lafferty
Nichols, Jackson, Dillard, Hager & Smith, L.L.P.
1800 Lincoln Plaza
500 North Akard
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2008-10086

Dear Mr. Lafferty:

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# 316772.

The City of Lancaster (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for the pay scales, compensation rates, any additional pay benefits, and employee benefits for the city fire department during a specified time period. 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 information you have submitted. We have also received and considered comments from the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

Initially, the requestor contends that the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022 provides in relevant part the following:

- (a) Without limiting the amount or kind of information that is public information under this chapter, the following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure under this chapter unless they are expressly confidential under other law:

(3) information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the receipt or expenditure of public or other funds by a governmental body[.]

Id. § 552.022(a)(3). Upon review of the submitted information, we find that it contains information in a contract relating to the expenditure of public funds. The city must release this information unless it is expressly confidential under other law. Although you raise section 552.103 of the Government Code for this information, this exception is discretionary and does not make information confidential. See *Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469, 475-76 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive section 552.103); Open Records Decision No. 542 at 4 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.103 may be waived). Thus, section 552.103 does not constitute other law for the purpose of section 552.022. Therefore, the city may not withhold the information we have marked under section 552.103. The remaining information, however, does not consist of information that is subject to section 552.022. Therefore, we will address your section 552.103 argument for the remaining information.

Section 552.103 provides in part:

(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, and provide documentation showing, that prior to the city's receipt of this request, a lawsuit styled *City of Lancaster, Texas v. David Clopton*, Cause No. 06-05967-B was filed

and pending in the District Court 44th Judicial District, Dallas County, Texas. Based upon your representation and our review, we conclude that litigation was pending when the city received the request. You also state that the requested information is related to this lawsuit because the defendant is moving the court for enforcement of a judgment that includes an award for loss of pay and benefits. Thus, we also conclude that the remaining information is related to the pending litigation for the purposes of section 552.103. Therefore, the city may withhold the remaining 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 submitted information that has either been obtained from or provided to all other 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).

In summary, the city may withhold the information that is not subject to section 552.022 under section 552.103. The remaining information must be released.

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).

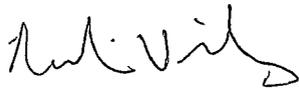
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records 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,



Melanie J. Villars
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MJV/jh

Ref: ID# 316772

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Barbara Emerson
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(w/o enclosures)