



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

April 16, 2010

Mr. W. Montgomery Meitler
Assistant Counsel
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701-1494

OR2010-05467

Dear Mr. Meitler:

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# 376368 (TEA PIR# 12591).

The Texas Education Agency (the "agency") received a request for: 1) the name of the individual who made an allegation that a named employee of Hamilton Independent School District had an inappropriate relationship with a student and engaged in inappropriate conduct involving female students, and 2) any evidence presented to support the accusations. You state the agency will release some responsive information to the requestor. You claim 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 representative sample of information.¹

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.

¹We assume 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 those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

(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 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 of the receipt of the request for information and (2) the information at issue is related to the pending or anticipated 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). The agency must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

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." Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). In the context of anticipated litigation in which the governmental body is the prospective plaintiff, 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"). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. See Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986).

You inform us the submitted information is related to an open investigation of allegations that an educator engaged in inappropriate conduct. You state the alleged misconduct may require the agency to file a petition for sanctions against the educator pursuant to provisions of the Education Code and title 19 of the Texas Administrative Code. See Educ. Code §§ 21.031(a) (the agency shall regulate and oversee standards of conduct of public school educators), 21.041(b) (the agency shall propose rules providing for disciplinary proceedings); 19 T.A.C. §§ 247.2(b)(1)(F), 249.15(c). You explain that if the educator files an answer to the petition, the matter will be referred to the State Office of Administrative Hearings for a contested case proceeding. See 19 T.A.C. § 249.18. You state that such proceedings are governed by the Administrative Procedure Act (the "APA"), chapter 2001 of the Government Code. See Educ. Code § 21.041(b)(7); 19 T.A.C. § 249.4(a)(1). For purposes of section 552.103(a), this office considers a contested case under the APA to constitute "litigation." Open Records Decision No. 588 at 7 (1991) (construing statutory predecessor). Based on your representations and our review, we determine the agency reasonably

anticipated litigation on the date that it received the request for information. Furthermore, you explain the submitted information was compiled for the purpose of investigating the alleged educator misconduct. Upon review of the submitted information, we agree the submitted information relates to the anticipated litigation. We therefore conclude the agency may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

We note, however, that once information has been obtained by all parties to the anticipated 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. Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends when the litigation has concluded or is no longer reasonably anticipated. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 at 2; Open Records Decision Nos. 350 at 3 (1982), 349 at 2.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Jessica Eales
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JCE/eeg

Ref: ID# 376368

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)