



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 12, 2010

Ms. LeAnne Lundy
Rogers, Morris & Grover, L.L.P
For New Caney Independent School District
5718 Westheimer Road, Suite 1200
Houston, Texas 77057

OR2010-15467

Dear Ms. Lundy:

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# 398304 (New Caney Independent School District request numbers 10-47 and 10-49).

The New Caney Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received two requests from the same requestor for information concerning complaints, worker's compensation claims and correspondence involving Aikin Elementary School. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, you inform us the district asked the requestor to clarify the requests. *See* Gov't Code § 552.222(b) (governmental body may communicate with requestor for purpose of clarifying or narrowing request for information); *see also City of Dallas v. Abbott*, 304 S.W.3d 380, 387 (Tex. 2010). You state the district has not received a response to its request for clarification. However, a governmental body must make a good-faith effort to relate a request for information held by the governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision No. 561 at 8 (1990). In this case, as you have submitted responsive information for our review and raised exceptions to disclosure for this information, we consider the district to have made a good-faith effort to identify the information that is responsive to the request, and we will address the applicability of the claimed exceptions to the submitted information. We further determine the district has no obligation at this time to release any additional information that may be responsive to the request for which it has not received clarification. However, if the requestor responds to the request for clarification, the district must again seek a ruling from this office before withholding any additional responsive information from the requestor. *See City of Dallas*, 304 S.W.3d at 387.

We now turn to your assertion of section 552.103 of the Government Code, which provides in relevant 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). The governmental body claiming this exception bears the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to demonstrate the applicability of the exception. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation is 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). The governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

To establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated for purposes of section 552.103, a governmental body must provide this office with "concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture." *See* Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *See* ORD 452 at 4. Concrete evidence may include, for example, the governmental body's receipt of a letter containing a specific threat to sue the governmental body from an attorney for a potential opposing party. Open Records Decision No. 555 (1990); *see* Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989) (litigation must be "realistically contemplated"). Furthermore, this office has stated that a pending Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC") complaint indicates litigation is reasonably anticipated. Open Records Decision Nos. 386 at 2 (1983), 336 at 1 (1982).

In this instance, you state the requestor is a former employee of the district who had submitted a worker's compensation claim for an alleged workplace injury. You state her initial claim was denied. Subsequently, in her requests for information, the requestor stated she was seeking information from the district because she is pursuing a worker's compensation claim. You assert the district anticipates the denied claim will lead to

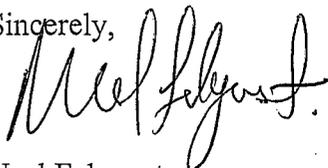
litigation and the information the requestor seeks will be used to pursue that litigation. Based upon your representations and our review of the submitted information, we conclude the district reasonably anticipated litigation prior to the date of the request for information. We also find the submitted information relates to the anticipated litigation for purposes of section 552.103(a).

We note, however, the submitted information contains documents written or seen by the requestor. The purpose of section 552.103 is to enable a governmental body to protect its position in litigation by forcing parties to obtain information relating to litigation through discovery procedures. *See* ORD 551 at 4-5. Consequently, if the opposing party has previously seen or had access to the information, through discovery or otherwise, there is no interest in withholding such information from public disclosure under section 552.103. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Therefore, with the exception of the documents written or seen by the requestor, the district may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103(a) of the Government Code.¹ As this ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure.

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,



Neal Falgoust
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

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¹We note the requestor has a special right of access to some of the information being released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(a) (person or person's authorized representative has special right of access, beyond right of general public, to information held by governmental body that relates to person and is protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect person's privacy interests). Therefore, if the district receives another request for this particular information from a different requestor, then the district should again seek a ruling from this office.

Ref: ID# 398304

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)