



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

GREG ABBOTT

May 17, 2011

Mr. Warren M. S. Ernst
Chief of the General Counsel Division
Office of the City Attorney
City of Dallas
1500 Marilla Street, Room 7BN
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2011-06897

Dear Mr. Ernst:

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# 421923.

The City of Dallas (the "city") received a request for information relating to the stop sign at a particular intersection, certain policies and procedures, and the investigation of the claim arising out of an auto collision. You state the requestor will be provided with some of the requested information. You claim the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted sample of information.¹

You seek to withhold the information submitted as Exhibit B pursuant to section 552.103 of the Government Code. This section provides in relevant part 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

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.

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 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 when 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).

In order 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). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *See id.* In Open Records Decision No. 638 (1996), this office determined a governmental body met its burden of showing that litigation is reasonably anticipated when it received a notice of claim letter and represented the notice of claim letter is in compliance with the requirements of the Texas Tort Claims Act, chapter 101 of the Texas Civil Practice & Remedies Code, or an applicable municipal ordinance. If a governmental body does not make this representation, the claim letter is a factor this office will consider in determining whether a governmental body has established that litigation is reasonably anticipated based on the totality of the circumstances.

You state, and provide documentation showing, the city received a notice of claim alleging damages from an auto collision prior to the date it received the instant request for information. You state the notice of claim was filed in compliance with the requirements of chapter XXIII of the city's charter which governs such claims. You state, and the submitted information reflects, the information in Exhibit B relates to the anticipated litigation. Based on your representations and our review, we find that the information in Exhibit B relates to litigation that was reasonably anticipated when the request for information was received.

Therefore, the city may withhold the information in Exhibit B under section 552.103 of the Government Code.²

However, we note that 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. *See* 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. *See* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

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,



Karen Hattaway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KEH/sdk

Ref: ID# 421923

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

²As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address your other argument against disclosure of this information.