



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 11, 2012

Mr. Mark G. Mann
Assistant City Attorney
City of Garland
P.O. Box 469002
Garland, Texas 75046-9002

OR2012-07030

Dear Mr. Mann:

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# 453400 (GCA 12-0146).

The Garland Police Department (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to a specific incident, including unredacted narrative reports, photos, video and audio recordings. 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.

Initially, we note that some of the submitted information consists of completed reports that are subject to section 552.022(a)(1) of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a)(1) provides:

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 unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

- (1) a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body, except as provided by Section 552.108[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). You seek to withhold the completed reports under section 552.103 of the Government Code. However, section 552.103 is discretionary in nature and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, S.W.3d 69, 475-6 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive section 552.103); Open Records Decision No. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally). Thus, the department may not withhold the completed reports, which we have marked, under section 552.103. As you raise no additional exceptions to disclosure of the completed reports, the department must release them pursuant to section 552.022(a)(1) of the Government Code.¹ However, we will address your argument against disclosure of the remaining information, which is not subject to section 552.022.

Next, we address the department's claim under section 552.103 of the Government Code for the remaining information at issue. 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.

...

(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 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 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.*

¹We note the information being released contains confidential information to which the requestor has a right of access under section 552.023 of the Government Code as his client's authorized representative. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(a) (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). Thus, if the department receives another request for this particular information from a different requestor, then the department should again seek a decision from this office.

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 demonstrate that litigation is reasonably anticipated, the governmental body must provide this office “concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation might ensue is more than a 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.* We note that the fact that a potential opposing party has hired an attorney who makes a request for information does not establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated. *See* Open Records Decision No. 361 (1983). In Open Records Decision 638 (1996), this office stated that, when a governmental body receives a notice of claim letter, it can meet its burden of showing that litigation is reasonably anticipated by representing that the notice of claim letter is in compliance with the requirements of the Texas Tort Claims Act (the “TTCA”), Civil Practice and Remedies Code, chapter 101, or an applicable municipal ordinance. If that representation is not made, the receipt of the claim letter is a factor we will consider in determining, from the totality of the circumstances presented, whether the governmental body has established litigation is reasonably anticipated. *See* ORD 638 at 4.

You inform us, and provide documentation showing, that in the same letter the requestor makes his request for information, he provides notice of a claim for damages by his client against the department and its employees. You do not affirmatively represent to this office that the notice of claim complies with the TTCA or an applicable ordinance; therefore, we will only consider the claim as a factor in determining whether the department reasonably anticipated litigation over the incident in question. Nevertheless, based on your representations, our review of the submitted information, and the totality of the circumstances, we determine the department has established it reasonably anticipated litigation on the date it received the request for information. We also find the remaining information is related to the anticipated litigation for purposes of section 552.103. Accordingly, the department may withhold the remaining information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

We note, however, once the information at issue has been obtained by all parties to the anticipated 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 information at issue that has either been obtained from or provided to all opposing parties 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 concluded or is no longer reasonably anticipated. *See* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); *see also* 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,



Jeffrey W. Giles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWG/dls

Ref: ID# 453400

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)