



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 18, 2012

Ms. Shirley Thomas
Senior Assistant General Counsel
Dallas Area Rapid Transit
P.O. Box 660163
Dallas, Texas 75266-0163

OR2012-16688

Dear Ms. Thomas:

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# 468236 (DART ORR# 9197).

Dallas Area Rapid Transit ("DART") received a request for the monthly bus and rail safety reports for a specified time period and information pertaining to any bus, van, or rail accident involving personal injury or property damage of more than \$500 for a specified time period.¹ You indicate you will release some information to the requestor upon his response to a cost estimate. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, and 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.²

Initially, we note some of the submitted information, which we have marked, is not responsive because it was created after the date DART received the request. This ruling does

¹We note DART received clarification regarding this request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.222(b) (governmental body may communicate with requestor for purpose of clarifying or narrowing request for information).

²We 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.

not address the public availability of non-responsive information, and DART need not release such information in response to this request.

Next, we note some of the responsive information consists of a completed report made by or for DART, which is subject to section 552.022(a)(1) of the Government Code. Pursuant to section 552.022(a)(1), completed investigations, reports, and evaluations are expressly public unless they are either excepted under section 552.108 of the Government Code or confidential under the Act or other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). Although you raise section 552.103 of the Government Code, section 552.103 is a discretionary exception to disclosure and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See id.* § 552.007; *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 Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 (1999) (governmental body may waive section 552.103). As such, section 552.103 does not make information confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. Therefore, DART may not withhold the completed report, which we have marked, under section 552.103 of the Government Code. However, we note portions of the marked report are subject to section 552.117 of the Government Code.³ Because section 552.117 makes information confidential under the Act, we will address its applicability to the marked report.

Section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure the home address and telephone number, emergency contact information, social security number, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body who request this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. Gov't Code § 552.117(a). Whether a particular piece of information is protected by section 552.117 must be determined at the time the request for it is made. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). Thus, information may be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) only on behalf of a current or former employee who made a request for confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. Information may not be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) on behalf of a current or former employee who did not timely request under section 552.024 the information be kept confidential. Upon review, we find DART must withhold the information we have marked in the completed report subject to section 552.022(a)(1) under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code. As no further exceptions to disclosure have been raised for the remaining information subject to section 552.022(a)(1), it must be released.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information that comes within the attorney-client privilege. When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676

³The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made “for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services” to the client governmental body. *See* TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *See In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, lawyer representatives, and a lawyer representing another party in a pending action and concerning a matter of common interest therein. *See* Tex. R. Evid. 503(b)(1). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a confidential communication, *id.*, meaning it was “not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication.” *Id.* 503(a)(5). Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the intent of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *See Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, orig. proceeding). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

You state the memorandum in Attachment B consists of a communication between a DART employee and the DART claims committee, which is comprised of DART employees and the general counsel of DART. You state the memorandum in Attachment B-1 consists of a communication between a DART employee and a DART attorney. You explain these communications were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to DART. You further state these communications were intended to be confidential and not disclosed to third parties. We understand these communications have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the memorandums in Attachments B and B-1, which we have marked. Accordingly, DART may withhold the marked information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.⁴

⁴As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code 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 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. 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 from disclosure under section 552.103(a).

To establish 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." See Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). Concrete evidence to support a claim litigation is reasonably anticipated 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. See Open Records Decision No. 555 (1990); see also Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989) (litigation must be "realistically contemplated"). In addition, this office has concluded litigation was reasonably anticipated when the potential opposing party hired an attorney who made a demand for disputed payments and threatened to sue if the payments were not made promptly, or when an individual threatened to sue on several occasions and hired an attorney. See Open Records Decision Nos. 346 (1982), 288 (1981). On the other hand, this office has determined if an individual publicly threatens to bring suit against a governmental body, but does not actually take objective steps toward filing suit, litigation is not reasonably anticipated. See Open Records Decision No. 331 (1982). Further, the fact that a potential opposing party has hired an attorney who makes a request for information does not establish litigation is reasonably anticipated. See Open Records Decision No. 361 (1983).

You state, and provide documentation showing, prior to DART's receipt of the request for information, DART received demand letters for damages related to injuries allegedly caused by DART employees. You also state some of the remaining responsive information in Attachment B-1 pertains to litigation that was pending prior to DART's receipt of the request for information. Based on your representations and our review, we agree DART reasonably anticipated litigation and was involved in pending litigation prior to the date it received the request for information. We also find the information at issue is related to the anticipated and pending litigation for purposes of section 552.103(a). Therefore, DART may generally withhold the remaining responsive information in Attachment B-1 under section 552.103.⁵

However, we note the opposing party in the anticipated litigation has seen or had access to some of the information at issue. 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. Thus, if the opposing party has seen or had access to information relating to litigation, through discovery or otherwise, then 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, the information we have marked is not protected by section 552.103 and may not be withheld on that basis. We also note the applicability of section 552.103 ends once the related litigation concludes or is no longer reasonably anticipated. See Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982). Accordingly, with the exception of the information we have marked for release, DART may withhold the remaining responsive information in Attachment B-1 under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by section 201.402 of the Occupations Code, which provides in part the following:

(a) Communications between a chiropractor and a patient relating to or in connection with any professional services provided by a chiropractor to the patient are confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this subchapter.

(b) Records of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by a chiropractor that are created or maintained by a chiropractor are confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this subchapter.

(c) A person who receives information from the confidential communications or records, excluding a person listed in Section 201.404(a) who is acting on the patient's behalf, may not disclose the information except to the extent that

⁵As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

disclosure is consistent with the authorized purposes for which the information was first obtained.

Occ. Code § 201.402(a)-(c). Chiropractic records must be released on the patient's signed, written consent, provided that the consent specifies: (1) the information records covered by the release; (2) the reason or purpose for the release; and (3) the person to whom the information is to be released. *See id.* §§ 201.404, .405. Upon review, we find the information we have marked in Attachment B consists of chiropractic records subject to section 201.402 of the Occupations Code. Thus, DART may only release the information we have marked in accordance with chapter 201 of the Occupations Code.⁶

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrines of common-law and constitutional privacy. The doctrine of common-law privacy protects information if it (1) contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both prongs of this test must be established. *Id.* at 681-82. The types of information considered intimate or embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* included information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. *Id.* at 683.

Constitutional privacy consists of two inter-related types of privacy: (1) the right to make certain kinds of decisions independently and (2) an individual's interest in avoiding disclosure of personal matters. *See Whalen v. Roe*, 429 U.S. 589, 599-600 (1977); Open Records Decision Nos. 600 at 3-5 (1992), 478 at 4 (1987), 455 at 3-7 (1987). The first type protects an individual's autonomy within "zones of privacy," which include matters related to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relationships, and child rearing and education. ORD 455 at 4. The second type of constitutional privacy requires a balancing between the individual's privacy interests and the public's need to know information of public concern. *Id.* at 7. The scope of information protected by constitutional privacy is narrower than that under common-law privacy; constitutional privacy under section 552.101 is reserved for "the most intimate aspects of human affairs." *Id.* at 5 (quoting *Ramie v. City of Hedwig Village, Tex.*, 765 F.2d 490 (5th Cir. 1985)).

Upon review, we find you have not demonstrated that any of the remaining responsive information is highly intimate or embarrassing and not a matter of legitimate public interest. Furthermore, you have failed to demonstrate how any of the remaining information falls within the zones of privacy or implicates an individual's privacy interests for purposes of constitutional privacy. Therefore, DART may not withhold any of the remaining responsive

⁶As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law or constitutional privacy.

In summary, DART must withhold the information we have marked in the completed report subject to section 552.022(a)(1) of the Government Code under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code and release the remaining information in the report. DART may withhold the information we have marked under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. With the exception of the information we have marked for release, DART may withhold the remaining responsive information in Attachment B-1 under section 552.103 of the Government Code. DART may only release the chiropractic records we have marked in accordance with chapter 201 of the Occupations Code. The remaining information must be released.

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,



Nneka Kanu
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

NK/bhf

Ref: ID# 468236

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)