



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

June 4, 2013

Ms. Ellen H. Spalding  
Counsel for Eanes Independent School District  
Rogers, Morris & Grover, L.L.P.  
5718 Westheimer Road, Suite 1200  
Houston, Texas 77057

OR2013-09258

Dear Ms. Spalding:

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# 489542 (EISD Request 3491).

The Eanes Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for the last date of work for a named district employee and information pertaining to the named individual's new job. 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 representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup> We have also received and considered comments from the requestor. *See Gov't Code* § 552.304 (interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

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

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<sup>1</sup>We 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.

*Id.* § 552.103(a), (c). A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show section 552.103(a) 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 the governmental body received the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *See 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). A governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a). *See* ORD 551.

This office has long held "litigation," for purposes of section 552.103, includes "contested cases" conducted in a quasi-judicial forum. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 474 (1987), 368 (1983), 336 (1982), 301 (1982). In determining whether an administrative proceeding is conducted in a quasi-judicial forum, some of the factors this office considers are whether the administrative proceeding provides for discovery, evidence to be heard, factual questions to be resolved, the making of a record, and whether the proceeding is an adjudicative forum of first jurisdiction with appellate review of the resulting decision without a re-adjudication of fact questions. *See* Open Records Decision No. 588 (1991).

Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *See* Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). To establish litigation is reasonably anticipated, a governmental body must provide this office with "concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture." *Id.* 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 first assert litigation against the district is currently pending or is reasonably anticipated because, prior to the district's receipt of the instant request for information, the requestor filed internal grievances with the district. You state complaints filed with the district are "litigation" in that the district follows administrative procedures in handling such disputes. You explain, under the district's grievance policy, the grievant proceeds through a three-level process wherein hearing officers hear the complaint at level one and level two, and the district's board of trustees (the "board") hears the grievance if the grievant appeals to level three. You state the grievant is allowed to be represented by counsel, present favorable evidence to the district, and present witnesses to testify on the grievant's behalf. Based on your representations, we find you have demonstrated the district's administrative procedures for grievances are conducted in a quasi-judicial forum, and thus, constitute litigation for purposes of section 552.103. You inform us the board heard the requestor's complaint on March 5, 2013, prior to the district's receipt of the instant request. You contend, however, litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated in this matter because the statute of limitations for the requestor to file an appeal to the Commissioner of Education has not yet run. However, because an appeal has not been filed, we find you have not demonstrated the district is a party to pending or anticipated litigation based on the district's grievance hearings.

You also explain the requestor has filed complaints with the State Bar of Texas against three attorneys associated with the district. You have not explained how complaints filed with the State Bar of Texas are litigation for the purposes of section 552.103. You also have not explained how the district is a party to any litigation involving the State Bar of Texas complaints. Finally, you have provided an email dated March 7, 2013, in which the requestor accuses the district of libel and slander. You state the district interprets this e-mail to be a threat of litigation. However, upon review of your arguments, you have not provided this office with evidence the requestor had taken any objective steps toward filing a lawsuit prior to the date the district received the instant request for information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(A); ORD 331. Thus, based on your representations and our review, we find you have failed to demonstrate litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the district received the request for information. Therefore, the district may not withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code. As you raise no further exceptions to disclosure, the district must release the submitted information.

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl\\_ruling\\_info.shtml](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml), 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lindsay E. Hale". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Lindsay E. Hale  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

LEH/tch

Ref: ID# 489542

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)