



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 24, 2013

Ms. Danielle R. Folsom
Assistant City Attorney
Legal Department
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2013-12792

Dear Ms. Folsom:

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# 494055 (GC No. 20498).

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for a named police officer's civil service file. You claim 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 some of the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part:

(a) [T]he 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). A portion of the submitted information, which we have marked, consists of completed evaluations subject to subsection 552.022(a)(1). The city must release the completed evaluations pursuant to subsection 552.022(a)(1) unless they are

excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code or is made confidential under the Act or other law. *See id.* § 552.022(a)(1). Although you seek to withhold the information at issue under section 552.103 of the Government Code, that section is a discretionary exception and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See 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 Gov't Code § 552.103); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, the marked evaluations may not be withheld under section 552.103 of the Government Code. As you claim no other exception to the disclosure of the marked evaluations, they must be released. However, we will address your argument under section 552.103 for the information not subject to section 552.022.

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. 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). *See* ORD 551 at 4.

You claim the information not subject to section 552.022 is related to pending litigation in which the city is a party. You state, and provide documentation showing, litigation styled *Lashonda Rochelle v. City of Houston*, Cause No. 2011-01184, is pending in the 269th Judicial District Court in Harris County, Texas. You further state the submitted civil service file of the named officer is related to the pending litigation because the officer "is a person

with knowledge of relevant facts in the case and therefore a potential witness.” Based on your representations and our review, we find litigation was pending when the city received the present request for information, and the information at issue is related to the pending litigation. Accordingly, the city may withhold the information not subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code 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 obtained from or provided to all other 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.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,



Kristi L. Wilkins
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KLW/bhf

Ref: ID# 494055

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)