



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 31, 2013

Mr. Renaldo Stowers
Senior Associate General Counsel
Office of General Counsel
University of North Texas System
1155 Union Circle, #310907
Denton, Texas 76203-5017

OR2013-19048

Dear Mr. Stowers:

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# 504111 (UNT PIR No. 002118).

The University of North Texas (the "university") received a request for the police report regarding a specified incident. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides in 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

¹We assume that 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 that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

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, orig. proceeding); *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." Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *Id.* In Open Records Decision No. 638 (1996), this office stated a governmental body has met its burden of showing litigation is reasonably anticipated by representing it received a notice-of-claim letter that is in compliance with the Texas Tort Claims Act ("TTCA"), chapter 101 of the Civil Practices and Remedies Code. *See* ORD 638 at 4. If that representation is not made, the receipt of a claim letter is a factor we will consider in determining, from the totality of the circumstances presented, whether the governmental body has established that litigation is reasonably anticipated. *Id.*

You assert the submitted information relates to litigation reasonably anticipated by the university. You state the request for information also serves as a claim letter. You do not state the letter complies with the notice requirements of the TTCA. However, in the claim letter, the requestor states he is representing his clients in their claim regarding a near drowning incident at the university. Further, you note the requestor threatens to "immediately file suit and seek court intervention" if the university fails to preserve evidence regarding this claim. Based on our review of the information and the totality of the circumstances, we find the university reasonably anticipated litigation at the time it received the request. Further, we find the information at issue is related to the anticipated litigation.

Accordingly, we conclude the university may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.²

We note, however, once the information has been obtained by all parties to the anticipated litigation, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision No. 349 at 2 (1982). We also note the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends when the litigation has concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982) at 2; Open Records Decision Nos. 350 at 3 (1982), 349 at 2.

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,



Cynthia G. Tynan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CGT/bhf

Ref: ID# 504111

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

²As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address your other argument to withhold this information.