



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 7, 2014

Mr. Milton Rister
Executive Director
Railroad Commission of Texas
P.O. Box 12967
Austin, Texas 78711-2967

OR2014-00393

Dear Mr. Rister:

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# 510028.

The Railroad Commission of Texas (the "commission") received a request for information related to the job performance of a named individual from a specified period of time and any complaints the named individual has filed against commission staff. You state you have released some of the requested information to the requestor. We note you have redacted personal e-mail addresses under section 552.137 of the Government Code pursuant to Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009).¹ You claim that some of 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.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides, in relevant part:

- (a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the

¹We note Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009) is a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold certain categories of information, including an e-mail address of a member of the public under section 552.137 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.

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). A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show section 552.103(a) applies 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 requested information 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, 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). A 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 contend some of the information in Exhibit 4 is related to pending litigation to which the commission is a party. You inform us, and have provided documentation demonstrating, litigation styled *Frederick Wright v. Railroad Commission of Texas*, Cause No. 2013-47739, is pending in the District Court of Harris County, 11th Judicial District. You state the information at issue is related to the pending lawsuit. Based on your representations, the submitted documentation, and our review of the information at issue, we find litigation was pending when the commission received this request for information and the information at issue is related to the pending litigation for the purposes of section 552.103. Therefore, the commission may withhold the information you have marked in Exhibit 4 under section 552.103 of the Government Code. As you raise no further exceptions to disclosure, the remaining information must be released.

We note, however, the purpose of section 552.103 is to enable a governmental body to protect its position in litigation by forcing parties seeking information relating to that litigation to obtain it through discovery procedures. *See* ORD 551 at 4-5. Thus, if the opposing party has seen or had access to information relating to the pending litigation through discovery or otherwise, there is no interest in withholding such information from public disclosure under section 552.103. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). We also note the applicability of section 552.103 ends once the related litigation concludes. *See* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Casterline', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sarah Casterline
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SEC/tch

Ref: ID# 510028

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)