



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 15, 2016

Mr. Quentin D. Price  
First Assistant City Attorney  
Legal Department  
City of Beaumont  
P.O. Box 3827  
Beaumont, Texas 77704-3827

OR2016-01272

Dear Mr. Price:

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# 594610 (TPIA No. 10-47).

The City of Beaumont (the "city") received a request for (1) the requestor's personnel records, (2) all e-mails to and from the requestor's city e-mail address, from a specific date range, and (3) all correspondence from the city legal department to the fire department administration pertaining to the requestor, from a specific date range. The city states it will release some information. The city claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception the city claims and reviewed the submitted 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, 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).

For purposes of section 552.103, “litigation” includes contested cases conducted in a quasi-judicial forum. Open Records Decision Nos. 588 at 2 (1991), 474 at 6 (1987) (disciplinary action before Texas State Board of Pharmacy), 368 at 2 (1983) (administrative hearing before Commissioner of Insurance), 301 at 1-2 (1982). Likewise, “contested cases” conducted under the Texas Administrative Procedure Act, chapter 2001 of the Government Code, constitute “litigation” for purposes of section 552.103. *See, e.g.*, ORD 588 at 7 (State Board of Insurance proceeding), 301 at 2 (hearing before Public Utilities Commission). Factors this office considers in determining whether an administrative proceeding is conducted in a quasi-judicial forum include 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* ORD 588 at 3-4.

The city provides documentation showing that, prior to the city's receipt of the request, the requestor filed an appeal challenging the city's actions regarding his suspension. You inform us the appeal is to be considered by a third-party hearing examiner, in binding arbitration, as authorized by chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. *See* Local Gov't Code §§ 143.057, .127-.131. We understand the arbitration is governed by the Labor Rules of the American Arbitration Association (the “AAA”). We note that under the AAA's Labor Rules, the parties may be represented by counsel, witnesses may be required to testify under oath, an arbitrator authorized by law to subpoena witnesses and documents may do so, and the arbitrator is the judge of the relevance and materiality of the evidence. Thus, we understand the city to assert the arbitration constitutes litigation of a judicial or quasi-judicial nature for purposes of section 552.103. *See generally* ORD 301 (discussing meaning of “litigation” under predecessor to section 552.103).

Based on these representations and our review, we find the city was a party to pending litigation when it received the request for information. We also find the information at issue relates to the pending litigation. Therefore, we conclude the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

However, we note once the information has been obtained by all parties to the pending 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](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,



Rahat Huq  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

RSH/som

Ref: ID# 594610

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)