



Office of the Attorney General
State of Texas

DAN MORALES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

June 23, 1997

Ms. Jennifer D. Soldano
Associate General Counsel
Texas Department of Transportation
Dewitt C. Greer State Highway Bldg
125 East 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR97-1434

Dear Ms. Soldano:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Open Records Act, chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 107222.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received two requests for various information concerning an automobile accident that occurred on June 23, 1996, on Highway 57, approximately five miles from Eagle Pass, Texas. You assert that the requested information is excepted from required public disclosure based on section 552.103 of the Government Code.

Section 552.103(a) of the Government Code reads as follows:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information:

(1) relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature or settlement negotiations, 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; and

(2) that the attorney general or the attorney of the political subdivision has determined should be withheld from public inspection.

To secure the protection of section 552.103(a), a governmental body must demonstrate that requested information "relates" to a pending or reasonably anticipated judicial or quasi-judicial proceeding. Open Records Decision No. 588 (1991). A governmental body has the

burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show the applicability of an exception in a particular situation. The test for establishing that section 552.103 applies is a two-prong showing that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210 (Tex. App.--Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.). You inform us that the department received a notice of claim that complies with the notice requirements of the Texas Tort Claims Act. *See* Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code, ch. 101. We, therefore, conclude that the department has established that litigation that concerns the requested information is reasonably anticipated. *See* Open Records Decision No. 638 (1996). Accordingly, the department may withhold the requested records from the requestors based on section 552.103 of the Government Code.¹

We are resolving this matter with this informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. This ruling is limited to the particular records at issue under the facts presented to us in this request and may not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records. If you have questions about this ruling, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,



Kay Guajardo
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KHG/rho

Ref.: ID# 107222

Enclosures: Submitted documents

cc: Mr. John H. Guerra
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(w/o enclosures)

¹If the opposing party in the litigation has seen or had access to any of the information in these records, there would be no justification for now withholding that information from the requestor pursuant to section 552.103(a). Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). In addition, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation is concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

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