



February 14, 2001

Mr. John Steiner  
Division Chief  
City of Austin Law Department  
P.O. Box 1088  
Austin, Texas 78767-8804

OR2001-0558

Dear Mr. Steiner:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 144177.

The City of Austin (the "city") received a request for eleven categories of information relating to Austin Fire Department Cadet Class 105. You inform us that you are releasing to the requestor the name, sex, ethnicity, salary, title and dates of employment of all employees in Class 105 pursuant to section 552.022(a)(2) of the Government Code. You claim, however, that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

Section 552.103(a), the "litigation exception," excepts from disclosure information relating to litigation to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party. The city has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show that 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, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *University of Tex. Law Sch. v. Texas 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

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<sup>1</sup>We assume that the "representative samples" of records submitted to this office are 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.

Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). The city must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

You inform us that litigation involving the city is currently pending in the District Court, 98<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, Travis County, Texas, in the matter of *Michael Rhone vs. City of Austin, et. al.*, Cause No. GN001330. You state that Mr. Rhone was an unsuccessful applicant for a position in Class 105, and that he alleges, among other things, that the hiring decision was "tainted by racial animus." You have also submitted information to this office showing that the requestor has filed a complaint with the Austin Human Rights Commission (the "AHRC"), and that two other complaints have been filed with the Texas Commission on Human Rights (the "TCHR"), all of which allege discrimination in the hiring process related to Class 105. The TCHR, and, we assume, the AHRC, operate as federal deferral agencies under section 706(c) of title VII, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC") defers jurisdiction to these agencies over complaints alleging employment discrimination.<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

This office has stated that a pending EEOC complaint indicates litigation is reasonably anticipated. Open Records Decision Nos. 386 at 2 (1983), 336 at 1 (1982). By showing that complaints filed with the TCHR and AHRC are pending, you have shown that litigation is reasonably anticipated. On this basis, and upon review of the submitted petition in the above-referenced cause, we conclude that you have established the applicability of section 552.103 to the information at issue. Our review of the records at issue also shows that they are related to the pending and anticipated litigation. Thus, you may withhold the requested information pursuant to section 552.103(a).

We note that 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 that the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends when the litigation is concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982) at 2; Open Records Decision Nos. 350 at 3 (1982), 349 at 2 (1982).

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full

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<sup>2</sup>We note that the requestor's claim filed with the AHRC has been assigned EEOC charge number 36AA00276.

benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Pearle  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MAP/seg

Ref: ID# 144177

Encl. Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Terry Tilton  
15405 Quinley  
Austin, Texas 78728  
(w/o enclosures)