



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

June 7, 2006

Ms. Julie Ross  
Lynn Pham & Ross, LLP  
University Centre II  
1320 South University Drive, Suite 720  
Fort Worth, Texas 76107

OR2006-05970

Dear Ms. Julie Ross:

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# 250977.

The City of Mineloa (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for "the letter sent from a [specified individual] to the city in the care of the city's attorney which threatened litigation . . . [and] any additional correspondence with the person on behalf of the city regarding the initial matter." You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.117, 552.1175, and 552.137 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides 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 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 on the date the request was received, 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, 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 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).

To establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated, the city 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). Concrete evidence to support a claim that litigation is reasonably anticipated may include, for example, the city's receipt of a letter containing a specific threat to sue the city from an attorney for a potential opposing party.<sup>1</sup> Open Records Decision No. 555 (1990); see Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989) (litigation must be "realistically contemplated"). On the other hand, this office has determined that if an individual publicly threatens to bring suit against a governmental body, but does not actually take objective steps toward filing suit, litigation is not reasonably anticipated. See Open Records Decision No. 331 (1982). Further, the fact that a potential opposing party has hired an attorney who makes a request for information does not establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated. Open Records Decision No. 361 (1983).

You inform us, and provide documentation showing, that litigation is currently pending against the city and the its police department for alleged civil rights violations by the police department. In addition, you explain that the city received a notice of claim letter regarding alleged misconduct by the city's police department. Thus, you explain that the city also reasonably anticipates litigation. However, you have not explained how the submitted information relates to the pending or anticipated litigation. Because you have not shown the submitted information at issue relates to the pending or anticipated litigation, you have failed to establish that section 552.103 applies to this information. See Gov't Code

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<sup>1</sup>In addition, this office has concluded that litigation was reasonably anticipated when the potential opposing party took the following objective steps toward litigation: filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, see Open Records Decision No. 336 (1982); hired an attorney who made a demand for disputed payments and threatened to sue if the payments were not made promptly, see Open Records Decision No. 346 (1982); and threatened to sue on several occasions and hired an attorney, see Open Records Decision No. 288 (1981).

§§ 552.301, .302; Open Records Decision Nos. 542 (1990) (stating that governmental body has burden of establishing that exception applies to requested information), 532 (1989), 515 (1988), 252 (1980). Therefore, the submitted information may not be withheld under section 552.103.

You also claim portions of the submitted information are protected by the doctrine of common law privacy. Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision" and encompasses common law privacy. See Gov't Code § 552.101. Common law privacy protects information if (1) the information contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) the information is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976), *cert. denied*, 430 U.S. 931 (1977). The type of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* included information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. 540 S.W.2d at 683.

The information you claim is protected by common law privacy pertains to city employees in relation to their city employment. However, there is a legitimate public interest in the qualifications of public employees and how those employees perform job functions and satisfy employment conditions. Thus, none of the submitted information is confidential under common law privacy, and therefore none of it may be withheld under section 552.101 on that basis. See Open Records Decision Nos. 470 (1987) (public employee's job performance does not generally constitute his private affairs), 455 (1987) (public employee's job performances or abilities generally not protected by privacy), 423 at 2 (1984) (scope of public employee privacy is narrow).

You also claim some of the submitted information is subject to section 552.117 of the Government Code. Section 552.117(a)(1) excepts from public disclosure the present and former home addresses and telephone numbers, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body who timely request that such information be kept confidential under section 552.024. Whether a particular piece of information is protected by section 552.117 must be determined at the time the request for it is made. See Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). The city may only withhold information under section 552.117(a)(1) on behalf of current or former officials or employees who made a request for confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date on which the request for this information was made. In this instance, you provide documentation showing that the employees and former employee whose personal information is at issue timely elected to keep their personal information confidential under section 552.024. Accordingly, pursuant to section 552.117(a)(1), the city must withhold the

personal information you have marked, as well as the additional personal information we have marked, under section 552.117(a)(1).<sup>2</sup>

The submitted information includes a private e-mail address. Section 552.137 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body” unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c). See Gov’t Code § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail address you have marked is not of a type specifically excluded by section 552.137(c). Therefore, the city must withhold this e-mail address in accordance with section 552.137 unless the city receives consent for its release.

In summary, the city must withhold the personal information marked pursuant to section 552.117 of the Government Code. The city must also withhold the e-mail address marked pursuant to section 552.137 of the Government Code unless the city receives consent for its release. The remaining submitted information must be released.

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 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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general’s Open Government Hotline, toll

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<sup>2</sup> As our ruling on this issue is dispositive, we need not address your argument against disclosure of this information under section 552.1175 of the Government Code.

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 Dep't of Pub. 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 Office of the Attorney General 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,



Ramsey A. Abarca  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

RAA/eb

Ref: ID# 250977

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. David Chenault  
KMOO-FM  
P. O. Box 628  
Mineola, Texas 75773  
(w/o enclosures)