



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January, 2009

Mr. W. Montgomery Meitler
Assistant Counsel
Office of Legal Services
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701-1494

OR2009-00897

Dear Mr. Meitler:

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# 332812 (TEA PIR #10340).

The Texas Education Agency (the "TEA") received a request for all records obtained by a named individual during an investigation of the requestor. You state that you will release some of the requested information to the requestor. You claim that 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.¹ Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides in 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 state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or

¹We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is 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.

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 that claims an exception to disclosure under section 552.103 has the burden of providing relevant facts and documentation sufficient to establish the applicability of this exception to the information at issue. To do so, the governmental body must demonstrate that (1) litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date of its receipt of the request for information and (2) the information at issue is related to the pending or anticipated litigation. *See Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.). Both elements of the test must be met in order for information to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.103. *See Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990).*

To establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated for the purposes of section 552.103, a governmental body must provide this office with "concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture." *See Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986).* In the context of anticipated litigation in which the governmental body is the prospective plaintiff, the concrete evidence must at least reflect that litigation is "realistically contemplated." *See Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989); see also Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982) (finding that investigatory file may be withheld if governmental body attorney determines that it should be withheld pursuant to section 552.103 and that litigation is "reasonably likely to result").* Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *See ORD 452 at 4.*

You inform us that the submitted information is related to an open investigation of allegations that an applicant for educator certification engaged in inappropriate conduct. You state that the alleged conduct may require the TEA to deny the application for certification. You further inform us that if the TEA does deny the application, the applicant may appeal that denial with a petition, which the TEA will answer and refer to the State Office of Administrative Hearings for a contested case pleading. *See Educ. Code §§ 21.031(a) (TEA shall regulate and oversee standards of conduct of public school educators), .041(b) (TEA shall propose rules providing for disciplinary proceedings); 19 T.A.C. § 249.15(c); see 19 T.A.C. § 249.18.* You state that such proceedings are governed by the Administrative Procedure Act (the "APA"), chapter 2001 of the Government Code. *See Educ. Code*

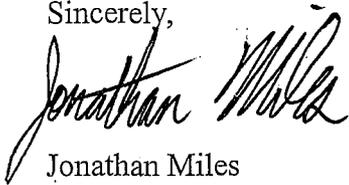
§ 21.041(b)(7); 19 T.A.C. § 249.4(a)(1); Open Records Decision No. 588 (1991) (contested case under APA constitutes litigation for purposes of statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.103). You assert that the submitted information consists of documents regarding TEA's investigation of the alleged educator misconduct. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we find that the submitted information is related to litigation that the TEA reasonably anticipated on the date of its receipt of this request for information. We, therefore, conclude that the TEA may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

We note, however, that once the information at issue has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to the information. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has concluded. *See* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); *see also* 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.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, 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 must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General at (512) 475-2497.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Miles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JM/cc

Ref: ID# 332812

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)