



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 17, 2014

Ms. Danielle R. Folsom
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2014-10425

Dear Ms. Folsom:

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# 526867 (City GC No. 21301).

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for copies of all letters of disciplinary suspensions and letters of written reprimand issues to all classified Houston Police Department employees during a specified time period. You state you have released some of the information. You claim 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.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides, in relevant 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 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 has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show section 552.103(a) applies in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request for information, and (2) the requested information is related to that litigation. *See 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). A governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a). *See* ORD 551 at 4.

You contend the submitted information is related to pending litigation to which the city is a party. You inform us, and have provided documentation demonstrating, litigation styled *Hazel Faltesek, Individually and as Representative of the Estate of Joe Frank Faltesek and Mary Heinlen, as Next Friend of Joel Sean Faltesek v. City of Houston*, cause no. 2014-05124, was pending in the District Court of Harris County, Texas, 234th Judicial District on the date the city received the request. You further explain the submitted information is related to the pending lawsuit because it consists of personnel information pertaining to specified police officers who were involved in the incident giving rise to the pending litigation. Based on your representations, the submitted documentation, and our review of the submitted information, we find litigation was pending when the city received this request for information, and we find the submitted information is related to the pending litigation for purposes of section 552.103. Therefore, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

We note, however, the purpose of section 552.103 is to enable a governmental body to protect its position in litigation by forcing parties seeking information relating to that litigation to obtain it through discovery procedures. *See* ORD 551 at 4-5. Thus, if the opposing party has seen or had access to information relating to the pending litigation through discovery or otherwise, there is no interest in withholding such information from public disclosure under section 552.103. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). We also note the applicability of section 552.103 ends once the related litigation concludes. *See* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); 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.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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lee Seidlits".

Lee Seidlits
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CLS/tch

Ref: ID# 526867

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)