



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 14, 2014

Mr. James W. Hryekewicz
Counsel for the Stephens County Sheriff's Office
Blaies & Hightower, L.L.P.
421 West Third Street, Suite 900
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2014-12089

Dear Mr. Hryekewicz:

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# 528989.

The Stephens County Sheriff's Office (the "the sheriff's office"), which you represent, received a request for the personnel file of an employee of the sheriff's office. You state the sheriff's office released some of the information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, 552.103, 552.117, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions 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 sheriff's office is a party. You inform us litigation styled *Shackelford v. Wade, et. al.*, cause no. CV-31184, was pending in the 90th Judicial District Court in Stephens County on the date the sheriff's office received the request. You further explain the submitted information is related to the pending lawsuit because the plaintiff has made allegations against the sheriff's office's deputy whose personnel information is at issue. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted information, we find litigation was pending when the sheriff's office 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 sheriff's office may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.¹

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).

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.

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,



Lee Seidlits
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CLS/tch

Ref: ID# 528989

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)