



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 19, 2015

Mr. Matthew L. Grove
Assistant County Attorney
County of Fort Bend
401 Jackson Street, 3rd Floor
Richmond, Texas 77469

OR2015-09708

Dear Mr. Grove:

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# 564147.

Fort Bend County (the "county") received a request for the video recordings related to a specified incident that resulted in injury to the requestor's client. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.103 of the Government Code. Further, you state release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of First Transit, Inc. ("First Transit"), a contractor for the county. Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified First Transit of the request for information and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the submitted information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in the Act in certain circumstances). We have received comments from First Transit. We have considered the claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.103 provides, in relevant part, the following:

- (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 claiming section 552.103 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 showing that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request, 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, 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). The governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a). *See* ORD 551.

To establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated, a governmental body 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). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *Id.* In Open Records Decision No. 638 (1996), this office stated that a governmental body has met its burden of showing that litigation is reasonably anticipated when it received a notice of claim letter and the governmental body represents that the notice of claim letter is in compliance with the requirements of the Texas Tort Claims Act ("TTCA"), Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code, ch. 101, or an applicable municipal ordinance.

The county states, prior to its receipt of the instant request, it reasonably anticipated litigation when it was made aware of a notice of claim received by First Transit relating to the incident that resulted in injury to the requestor's client. Further, you inform us the notice of claim complies with the requirements of the TTCA. Thus, we find the county reasonably anticipated litigation when it received the request for information. We also find the county has established the submitted information is related to the anticipated litigation for purposes of section 552.103(a). Therefore, we agree the county may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103(a) of the Government Code.¹

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining submitted argument.

Generally, however, once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to the opposing party in the anticipated litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a), and it must be disclosed. Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has been concluded. 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,



Lee Seidlits
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CLS/som

Ref: ID# 564147

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Brian T. Coolidge
Counsel for First Transit, Inc.
Lorance & Thompson, P.C.
2900 North Loop West, Suite 500
Houston, Texas 77092
(w/o enclosures)