



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 19, 2015

Ms. Ann-Marie Sheely  
Assistant County Attorney  
Travis County  
P.O. Box 1748  
Austin, Texas 78767-1748

OR2015-24369

Dear Ms. Sheely:

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# 587816.

The Travis County Attorney's Office (the "county attorney's office") received a request for communications pertaining to a specified arrest, communications with a named individual during a specified time period, and communications with the City of Austin pertaining to the requestor. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.108, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, you inform us some of the requested information was the subject of a previous request for information, in response to which this office issued Open Records Letter No. 2015-04788 (2015). In that ruling, we concluded the county attorney's office must withhold certain information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy, may withhold certain information under section 552.108(a)(2) of the Government Code, and release the remaining information. As we have no indication

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<sup>1</sup>We assume 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.

the law, facts, and circumstances on which the prior ruling was based have changed, the county attorney's office must continue to rely on Open Records Letter No. 2015-004788 as a previous determination and withhold or release the previously ruled upon information in accordance with that ruling. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (so long as law, facts, and circumstances on which prior ruling was based have not changed, first type of previous determination exists where requested information is precisely same information as was addressed in prior attorney general ruling, ruling is addressed to same governmental body, and ruling concludes that information is or is not excepted from disclosure).

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 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 the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing (1) litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request for information, 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). A governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

To establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated, 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). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *See id.* Concrete evidence to support a claim that litigation is reasonably anticipated may include, for example, the governmental body's receipt of a letter containing a specific threat to sue the governmental body from an attorney for a potential opposing party. 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 state, and submit documentation demonstrating, prior to the county attorney’s office’s receipt of this request, a lawsuit styled *Jermaine Hopkins v. David Escamilla, Travis County Attorney, et. al.*, was filed and is currently pending in the 345th Judicial District of Travis County, Texas. You further state the submitted information is related to the pending litigation because it pertains to the claims in the lawsuit. Upon review of your arguments and the information at issue, we find the submitted information relates to litigation that was pending when the county attorney’s office received this request for information. Accordingly, we find section the county attorney’s office may withhold the submitted information under 552.103 of the Government Code.

We note once information has been obtained by all parties to the pending litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. See Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to the opposing party in the pending 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).<sup>2</sup>

In summary, the county attorney’s office must continue to rely on Open Records Letter No. 2015-004788 as a previous determination and withhold or release the previously ruled upon information in accordance with that ruling. The county attorney’s office may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

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.

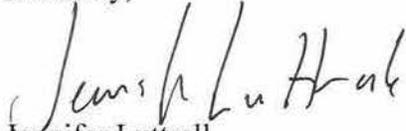
This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at [http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl\\_ruling\\_info.shtml](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml), or call the Office of the Attorney General’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for

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<sup>2</sup>As our ruling on this information is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against its disclosure.

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 black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Luttrall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "L".

Jennifer Luttrall  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JL/akg

Ref: ID# 587816

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)