



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 24, 2015

Mr. Charles D. Olson
Counsel for the city of Meridian
Haley & Olson, P.C.
510 North Valley Mills Drive, Suite 600
Waco, Texas 76710

OR2015-24761

Dear Mr. Olson:

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# 588500.

The City of Meridian (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for (1) the personnel file, driving record, and qualification file of a named individual; (2) specified policies and procedures; (3) any documents pertaining to disciplinary actions, reprimands, or complaints against the named individual; (4) specified documents pertaining to the vehicle involved in a specified accident; (5) the log books pertaining to the named individual during a specified time period; and (6) the record of duty status file for the named individual. You state you do not possess some of the requested information.¹ You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.102, 552.103, and 552.117 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

¹The Act does not require a governmental body to release information that did not exist when a request for information was received or to prepare new information in response to a request. See *Econ. Opportunities Dev. Corp. v. Bustamante*, 562 S.W.2d 266, 267-68 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1978, writ dism'd); Open Records Decision Nos. 605 at 2 (1992), 452 at 3 (1986), 362 at 2 (1983).

Initially, we note the submitted information contains a Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (“TCOLE”) identification number.² Section 552.002(a) of the Government Code defines “public information” as information that is written, produced, collected, assembled, or maintained under a law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business:

- (1) by a governmental body;
- (2) for a governmental body and the governmental body:
 - (A) owns the information;
 - (B) has a right of access to the information; or
 - (C) spends or contributes public money for the purpose of writing, producing, collecting, assembling, or maintaining the information; or
- (3) by an individual officer or employee of a governmental body in the officer’s or employee’s official capacity and the information pertains to official business of the governmental body.

Gov’t Code § 552.002(a). In Open Records Decision No. 581 (1990), this office determined certain computer information, such as source codes, documentation information, and other computer programming, that has no significance other than its use as a tool for the maintenance, manipulation, or protection of public property is not the kind of information made public under section 552.021 of the Government Code. We understand an officer’s TCOLE identification number is a unique computer-generated number assigned to peace officers for identification in TCOLE’s electronic database, and may be used as an access device number on the TCOLE website. Accordingly, we find the officer’s TCOLE identification number in the submitted information does not constitute public information under section 552.002 of the Government Code. Therefore, the TCOLE identification number is not subject to the Act and need not be released to the requestor.

We also note portions of the submitted information are subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part:

- (a) [T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

²The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education was renamed the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement by the 83rd Legislature. See Act of May 6, 2013, 83rd Leg., R.S., ch. 93, § 1.01, 2013 Tex. Gen. Laws 174, 174.

(1) a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body, except as provided by Section 552.108; [and]

...

(3) information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the receipt or expenditure of public or other funds by a governmental body[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1), (3). The submitted information contains a completed investigation subject to section 552.022(a)(1) and information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the expenditure of public funds subject to section 552.022(a)(3). This information must be released unless it is made confidential under the Act or other law. Although you raise section 552.103 of the Government Code for this information, this exception is discretionary in nature and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469, 475-76 (Tex. App.–Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive Gov't Code § 552.103); Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, the city may not withhold the information subject to section 552.022, which we have marked, under section 552.103. However, as sections 552.117 and 552.130 of the Government Code make information confidential under the Act, we will address the applicability of these sections to the information subject to section 552.022.³ Further, we will consider your argument under section 552.103 for the information not subject to section 552.022.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides, in relevant part, as follows:

(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

³The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

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). The 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 that (1) litigation is 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). The governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a).

The question of whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *See* Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). To demonstrate litigation is reasonably anticipated, the governmental body must provide this office “concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture.” *Id.* This office has concluded litigation was reasonably anticipated when the potential opposing party hired an attorney who made a demand for disputed payments and threatened to sue if the payments were not made promptly, or when an individual threatened to sue on several occasions and hired an attorney. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 346 (1982), 288 (1981). Further, concrete evidence to support a claim 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. *See* Open Records Decision No. 555 (1990); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989) (litigation must be “realistically contemplated”). On the other hand, this office has determined 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 litigation is reasonably anticipated. *See* Open Records Decision No. 361 (1983).

You state the city received a threat of a civil lawsuit contemporaneously with the receipt of the instant request. You state, and provide documentation demonstrating, an attorney provided the city with a letter wherein the attorney alleges liability on the part of the city in relation to an automobile collision. In the letter, the attorney states his client is asserting his “right to be paid and demands compensation” for the named individual’s negligence. Further, the attorney also states the city may avoid or “cut off the imposition of prejudgment interest by reaching an amicable settlement with [the attorney’s] client[.]” Additionally, the attorney informs the city “spoliation of evidence may lead to negative legal consequences in subsequent litigation of this claim.” Based upon these representations and our review, we find the city anticipated litigation at the time it received the present request. We also agree

the information at issue relates to the anticipated litigation for the purposes of section 552.103. Therefore, we find section 552.103(a) is applicable to the information not subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Accordingly, the city may withhold the information not subject to section 552.022 under section 552.103(a) of the Government Code.⁴

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).

We note a portion of the information subject to section 552.022(a)(1) of the Government Code is subject to section 552.117 of the Government Code. Section 552.117(a)(2) applies to records a governmental body holds in an employment capacity and excepts from public disclosure the current and former home addresses and telephone numbers, emergency contact information, social security number, and family member information of a peace officer, regardless of whether the peace officer made an election under section 552.024 or section 552.1175 of the Government Code to keep such information confidential. Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(2). Section 552.117(a)(2) applies to peace officers as defined by article 2.12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Accordingly, the information we have marked must be withheld under section 552.117(a)(2) of the Government Code.

We also note some of the information subject to section 552.022(a)(3) of the Government Code is subject to section 552.130 of the Government Code. Section 552.130 provides information relating to a motor vehicle operator's license, driver's license, motor vehicle title or registration, or personal identification document issued by an agency of this state or another state or country is excepted from public release. *See* Gov't Code § 552.130. Accordingly, the city must withhold the motor vehicle record information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, the submitted TCOLE identification number is not subject to the Act and need not be released to the requestor. The city may withhold the information not subject to section 552.022 under section 552.103(a) of the Government Code. The information we have marked must be withheld under section 552.117(a)(2) of the Government Code. The city must withhold the motor vehicle record information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.

⁴As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument under section 552.102 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, 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 black ink that reads "Cole Hutchison". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Cole Hutchison
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CH/bhf

Ref: ID# 588500

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)