



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 19, 2016

Ms. Kristi Godden  
Counsel for Valley View Independent School District  
O'Hanlon, McCollom & Demerath  
808 West Avenue  
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2016-21133

Dear Ms. Godden:

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# 626739 (Request ID# VVISD-001).

The Valley View Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for twelve categories of information pertaining to the employment of the requestor's client with the district. You state you have released some information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, we note some of the submitted information, which we have marked, is not responsive to the instant request for information because it was created after the district received the request for information or does not pertain to the named individual. This ruling does not address the public availability of any information that is not responsive to the request, and the district is not required to release such information in response to this request.

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

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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.

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). The purpose of section 552.103 is to enable a governmental body to protect its position in litigation by forcing parties to obtain information relating to litigation through discovery procedures. *See* Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4-5 (1990). A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show the section 552.103(a) exception applies 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 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. The governmental body must meet both parts of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a). *See* ORD 551 at 4.

This office has long held that "litigation," for purposes of section 552.103, includes "contested cases" conducted in a quasi-judicial forum. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 474 (1987), 368 (1983), 336 (1982), 301 (1982). In determining whether an administrative proceeding is conducted in a quasi-judicial forum, some of the factors this office considers are whether the administrative proceeding provides for discovery, evidence to be heard, factual questions to be resolved, the making of a record, and whether the proceeding is an adjudicative forum of first jurisdiction with appellate review of the resulting decision without a re-adjudication of fact questions. *See* Open Records Decision No. 588 (1991).

You state, and provide documentation showing, the requestor's client has filed a grievance against the district. You explain that grievances filed with the district are "litigation" in that the district follows administrative procedures in handling such disputes. You state the district's procedures include a multi-level process "wherein various administrators initially hear a grievance, and the district's Board of Trustee ultimately hears the grievance." You also state during these hearings the grievant is allowed to be represented by counsel, present evidence to the district, and a record is created at each level of the process. You further state the grievant must complete the district's grievance process in order to exhaust his administrative remedies before he can file suit in court. Based on your representations and

our review, we find the district's administrative procedure for disputes, as described above, is conducted in a quasi-judicial forum. Thus, the district's administrative procedure for disputes constitutes litigation for purposes of section 552.103.

You state, and provide documentation demonstrating, the requestor's client filed the grievance at issue against the district prior to the request for information. Thus, we determine the district was involved in pending litigation at the time it received the request for information. You state the responsive information relates to the pending litigation against the district. Upon review of your arguments and the information at issue, we find the responsive information is related to litigation involving the district that was pending on the date the request was received. Accordingly, we find the district may withhold the responsive information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.<sup>2</sup>

We note that once the information has been obtained by all parties to the pending litigation, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision No. 349 at 2 (1982). We also note that the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends when the litigation is concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982) at 2; Open Records Decision Nos. 350 at 3 (1982), 349 at 2.

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 providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Matthew Taylor  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MHT/dls

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<sup>2</sup>As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure.

Ref: ID# 626739

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)