



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 5, 2017

Ms. Holly A. Sherman
Counsel for the Alief Independent School District
Rogers Morris & Grover, LLP
5718 Westheimer Road, Suite 1200
Houston, Texas 77057

OR2017-20218

Dear Ms. Sherman:

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# 674088.

The Alief Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for specified information related to the termination of the requestor's client. You state you will release some information to the requestor. We understand the district has redacted information subject to section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code pursuant to section 552.024 of the Government Code, and social security numbers subject to section 552.147(b) of the Government Code.¹ You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, and 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.² We have also received and considered comments

¹Section 552.024 of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact from public release a current or former official or employee's home address and telephone number, emergency contact information, social security number, and family member information excepted from disclosure under section 552.117(a)(1) without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act, if the employee timely elected to withhold such information. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.024(a)-(c), .117(a)(1). Section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office. *See id.* § 552.147(b).

²We 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 those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

from the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

Initially, we note a portion of the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022 provides, in relevant part, the following:

(a) Without limiting the amount or kind of information that is public information under this chapter, the following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

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

Id. § 552.022(a)(1). Some of the submitted information, which we have marked, consists of completed evaluations. The district must release this information pursuant to section 552.022(a)(1) unless it is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code, or is made confidential under the Act or other law. *See id.* Although you seek to withhold the information at issue under section 552.103 of the Government Code, this section is discretionary 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); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally). Therefore, the district may not withhold the information subject to section 552.022(a)(1) under section 552.103 of the Government Code. As you raise no further exceptions to disclosure of this information, the district must release the information we marked under section 552.022(a)(1) of the Government Code. However, we will consider your arguments for the remaining information not subject to 552.022 of the Government Code.

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). 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 was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the department 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 under section 552.103(a). 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 assert litigation against the district is currently pending because prior to the receipt of this request, the requestor filed a grievance with the district pursuant to Board Policy DGBA (Local) prior to the district’s receipt of the request for information. You state, and provide documentation showing, the district’s complaint process consists of three levels, wherein district administrators hear the complaint at Levels I and II, and the district’s board of trustees, or its designee, hears the complaint at Level III. You explain that during these hearings, the complainant has the right to be represented by counsel, present evidence, and participate in the hearings. We understand the complainant must complete the district’s grievance process in order to exhaust all administrative remedies before the complainant can file suit in court. Further, you state the information at issue is related to the subject of the pending grievance involving the requestor’s client. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the district’s complaint process is conducted in a quasi-judicial forum and therefore constitutes litigation for purposes of section 552.103 of the Government Code. Moreover, we find the remaining information is related to the pending litigation. Therefore, the district may withhold the remaining information under section 552.103 of the Government.³

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 parties have seen or had access to information relating to the pending litigation,

³As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

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).

In summary, the district must release the information we marked under section 552.022(a)(1) of the Government Code. The district may withhold the remaining 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, 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,



Emily Buchanan
Attorney
Open Records Division

EB/eb

Ref: ID# 674088

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)