



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 25, 2019

Mr. Robert G. Schleier, Jr.
Counsel for the City of Kilgore
Law Office of Robert G. Schleier, Jr., P.C.
116 North Kilgore Street
Kilgore, Texas 75662

OR2019-20435

Dear Mr. Schleier:

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# 777101.

The Kilgore Police Department (the "department"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified accident involving the requestor's client. You claim some of the submitted information was not properly requested pursuant to section 1701.661 of the Occupations Code. You also claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.103 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.

Initially, we note the submitted information includes police officers' body worn camera recordings. Body worn cameras are subject to chapter 1701 of the Occupations Code. Chapter 1701 provides the procedures a requestor must follow when seeking a body worn camera recording. Section 1701.661(a) provides:

A member of the public is required to provide the following information when submitting a written request to a law enforcement agency for information recorded by a body worn camera:

¹Although you do not raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in your brief, we understand the department to assert this exception based on your markings.

- (1) the date and approximate time of the recording;
- (2) the specific location where the recording occurred; and
- (3) the name of one or more persons known to be a subject of the recording.

Occ. Code § 1701.661(a). In this instance, the requestor does not give the requisite information under section 1701.661(a). As the requestor did not properly request the body worn camera recordings at issue pursuant to chapter 1701, our ruling does not reach this information and it need not be released.² However, pursuant to section 1701.661(b), a “failure to provide all the information required by Subsection (a) to be part of a request for recorded information does not preclude the requestor from making a future request for the same recorded information.” *Id.* § 1701.661(b).

Next, we note the submitted information includes a CR-3 accident report. Section 550.065 of the Transportation Code applies only to a written report of an accident required under section 550.061, 550.062, or 601.004. *See* Transp. Code § 550.065(a)(1). Chapter 550 requires the creation of a written report when the accident resulted in injury to or the death of a person or damage to the property of any person to the apparent extent of \$1,000 or more. *Id.* §§ 550.061 (operator’s accident report), .062 (officer’s accident report). An accident report is privileged and for the confidential use of the Texas Department of Transportation or a local governmental agency of Texas that has use for the information for accident prevention purposes. *Id.* § 550.065(b). However, a governmental entity shall release an accident report in accordance with subsections (c) and (c-1). *Id.* § 550.065(c), (c-1). Section 550.065(c) provides a governmental entity shall release an accident report to a person or entity listed under this subsection. *Id.* § 550.065(c). In this instance, the requestor represents a person involved in the accident at issue. *See id.* § 550.065(c)(4)(b). Although the department asserts section 552.103 of the Government Code to withhold the information, a statutory right of access prevails over the Act’s general exceptions to public disclosure. *See, e.g.,* Open Records Decision Nos. 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exception to disclosure under the Act). Because section 552.103 is a general exception under the Act, the requestor’s statutory access under section 550.065(c) prevails and the county may not withhold the information under section 552.103 of the Government Code. Therefore, the department must release the submitted CR-3 accident report to this requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c) of the Transportation Code.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides, in part:

²As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

(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.³ 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

³In addition, this office has concluded that litigation was reasonably anticipated when the potential opposing party took the following objective steps toward litigation: filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *see* Open Records Decision No. 336 (1982); hired an attorney who made a demand for disputed payments and threatened to sue if the payments were not made promptly, *see* Open Records Decision No. 346 (1982); and threatened to sue on several occasions and hired an attorney, *see* Open Records Decision No. 288 (1981).

hired an attorney who makes a request for information does not establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated. Open Records Decision No. 361 (1983).

You provide documentation showing, prior to the department's receipt of the instant request, the City of Kilgore (the "city") received a letter from the requestor, an attorney, regarding the city's liability for injuries sustained by her client during the accident at issue. The letter states the city is liable under Texas law for personal injuries suffered as a result of negligent acts by the city and its employees or agents. Based on your representations, our review of the submitted information, and the totality of the circumstances, we find the city has established it reasonably anticipated litigation at the time the department received the instant request. We understand the information at issue relates to the litigation because it pertains to the basis of the anticipated litigation. Accordingly, we find the department may generally withhold the remaining information under section 552.103 of the Government Code on behalf of the city.

However, we note the information at issue involves alleged criminal activity. Information normally found on the front page of an offense or incident report is generally considered public. *Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976); *see* Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976). This office has stated basic information about a crime may not be withheld under section 552.103 of the Government Code even if it is related to the litigation. Open Records Decision No. 362 (1983). Thus, we find the basic offense information may not be withheld on the basis of section 552.103 of the Government Code. We note basic information does not include dates of birth or motor vehicle record information encompassed by section 552.130 of the Government Code. *See* ORD 127 at 3-4. Therefore, with the exception of basic information, the department may withhold the remaining information under section 552.103(a) of the Government Code on behalf of the city.

In summary, as the requestor did not properly request the body worn camera recordings at issue pursuant to chapter 1701 of the Occupations Code, our ruling does not reach this information and it need not be released. The department must release the submitted CR-3 accident report to this requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c) of the Transportation Code. With the exception of basic information, which must be released, the department may withhold the remaining information under section 552.103(a) of the Government Code on behalf of the city.

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 "Erin Groff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Erin Groff
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

EMG/mo

Ref: ID# 777101

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)