



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 15, 2019

Ms. Angelie Thomas
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2019-28812

Dear Ms. Thomas:

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# 791248 (GC No. W26025; GLO ID# 19-0753).

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to certain information related to the city's single-family home repair program. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. You also state you notified the Texas General Land Office (the "GLO") of the request for information and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the submitted information should not be released.¹ *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released). We have received comments from the GLO. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.²

¹ We note the city did not comply with the requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting this decision. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b), (e). Nonetheless, because section 552.101 of the Government Code and third-party interests can provide compelling reasons to overcome the presumption of openness, we will consider their applicability to the submitted information. *See id.* §§ 552.007, .302, .352.

² We assume that 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.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides 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 on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Id. § 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).

The GLO states a lawsuit styled *Texas Low Income Housing Information Service, Inc. v. Texas General Land Office*, Cause No. D-1-GN-18-001412, was pending against the GLO in the 201st Judicial District Court of Travis County, Texas, when the city received the instant request for information. The GLO states the submitted information is related to the pending lawsuit. Based on these representations and our review of the information at issue, we find litigation was pending against the GLO when the city received this request for information, and the information at issue is related to the pending litigation for the purposes of section 552.103. Therefore, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103(a) of the Government Code on behalf of the GLO.³

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 parties 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).

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

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 <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Erin Groff
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

EMG/rm

Ref: ID# 791248

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

c: Third Party
(w/o enclosures)