



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 24, 2020

Ms. Jessica Marsh
General Counsel
Texas Civil Commitment Office
4616 West Howard Lane, Building 2 Suite 350
Austin, Texas 78728

OR2020-09069

Dear Ms. Marsh:

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# 818169 (TCCO PIA No. 2020-0001).

The Texas Civil Commitment Office (the "TCCO") received a request for three categories of information pertaining to the requestor during specified time periods. The TCCO states it will release some information to the requestor. The TCCO indicates it is withholding some information in accordance with Open Record Letter Nos. 2017-11005 (2017) and 2020-00114 (2020). *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(a); Open Records Decision No. 673 at 7-8 (2001). The TCCO claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception the TCCO claims and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

The TCCO asserts the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code, which 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.

¹ 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.

...

(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 claiming section 552.103 has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents sufficient to establish the applicability of section 552.103 to the information it seeks to withhold. To meet this burden, the governmental body must demonstrate: (1) litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date of its receipt of the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *See Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, orig. proceeding); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.). Both elements of the test must be met in order for information to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.103. *See Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990).*

The TCCO states, and provides documentation showing, an appeal styled *Black v. McLane*, Case No. 07-19-00241-CV, was pending against the TCCO in the Seventh Court of Appeals of Texas when it received the instant request. Therefore, we agree litigation was pending on the date the TCCO received the present request for information. The TCCO also states the information at issue pertains to the substance of the claims in the lawsuit. Further, the TCCO states the information at issue has not been previously released to the opposing party through the discovery process. Based on the TCCO's representations and our review, we find the information at issue is related to the pending litigation. Therefore, we conclude the TCCO may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

Generally, however, once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation though discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982).* Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to all parties to the pending litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a) and must be disclosed. Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has concluded. *See Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); see also Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).*

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,

Gerald Arismendez
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

GAA/mo

Ref: ID# 818169

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)