



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

April 9, 2020

Ms. Lauren Downey  
Assistant Attorney General  
Public Information Coordinator  
Office of the Attorney General  
P.O. Box 12548  
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

OR2020-10640

Dear Ms. Downey:

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# 821217 (PIR# R003374).

The Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") received a request for information pertaining to specified cases listed in a specified Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (the "TDLR") press release. The OAG claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code. Additionally, the OAG states it notified the TDLR of the request for information and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the information at issue should not be released. *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 TDLR. We have considered the claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides in relevant part 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

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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.

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). The governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show section 552.103(a) is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation is 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). The governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a).

To establish litigation is reasonably anticipated, a governmental body must provide this office “concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation might ensue is more than mere conjecture.” Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). In the context of anticipated litigation in which the governmental body is the prospective plaintiff, the concrete evidence must at least reflect that litigation is “realistically contemplated.” See Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989); see also Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982) (finding that investigatory file may be withheld from disclosure if governmental body attorney determines that it should be withheld pursuant to section 552.103 and that litigation is “reasonably likely to result”). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. See ORD 452 at 4.

The OAG states its Consumer Protection Division (the “CPD”) is investigating activities that may constitute violations of the Texas Deceptive Trade Practices – Consumer Protection Act. The OAG indicates the CPD initiated the investigations at issue for enforcement purposes. The OAG states if the CPD uncovers violations of law during these investigations, the OAG will initiate enforcement proceedings and, therefore, anticipates litigation in these matters. Therefore, we find the OAG reasonably anticipated litigation when it received the present request for information. The OAG asserts, and we agree, the information at issue relates to the anticipated litigation. Accordingly, the OAG has demonstrated the applicability of section 552.103 to the information at issue and may withhold Exhibit C under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

However, once the information has been obtained by all parties to the pending or anticipated litigation, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open

Records Decision No. 349 at 2 (1982). We also note the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends when litigation has concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 at 2 (1982); Open Records Decision Nos. 350 at 3 (1982), 349 at 2.).

Section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if . . . release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(1) must explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). The OAG states the information at issue relates to pending criminal investigations by the OAG’s Criminal Investigations and Criminal Prosecutions Divisions. The OAG also states release of this information at this time would interfere with the OAG’s pending investigations. Based on the OAG’s representations, we conclude the release of this information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ’g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist] 1975), (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases), *writ ref’d n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Accordingly, the OAG may withhold Exhibit B under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

In summary, the OAG may withhold Exhibit C under section 552.103 of the Government Code. The OAG may withhold Exhibit B under section 552.108(a)(1) 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 <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,

Matthew Taylor  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MHT/eb

Ms. Lauren Downey - Page 4

Ref: ID# 821217

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party  
(w/o enclosures)