



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 4, 2020

Mr. Nicholas Morrell
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Criminal Justice
P.O. Box 4004
Huntsville, Texas 77342-4004

OR2020-22394

Dear Mr. Morrell:

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# 843005 (OGC# MW0005, MW0006 & MW0007).

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received three requests for all communications between named individuals during a specified time period containing certain keywords. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.111, and 552.134 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

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.

...

¹ 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 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).*

You state, and provide documentation demonstrating, a lawsuit styled *Valentine v. Collier*, Docket No. 4:20-CV-01115 was pending against the department in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas, Houston Division, at the time of the receipt of the present request for information. You state the information at issue relates to the pending litigation because it pertains to the allegation that is the subject of the lawsuit. Based on your representations and our review, we find the department was a party to pending litigation at the time it received the present request and the information at issue is related to the pending litigation for the purposes of section 552.103. Accordingly, the department may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.²

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 been 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

² As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure.

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,

Sean McCormick
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SMC/jxd

Ref: ID# 843005

Enc. Submitted documents

c: 2 Requestors
(w/o enclosures)