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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 16, 2020

Ms. Cynthia Trevino
Counsel for the Bandera Central Appraisal District
Denton Navarro Rocha Bernal & Zech, P.C.
2517 North Main Avenue
San Antonio, Texas 78212-4685

OR2020-23374

Dear Ms. Trevino:

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# 844544 (ORR# 20-148).

The Bandera Central Appraisal District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for a list of every sold property on which the requestor adjusted the improvement classification during a specified time period, the district's Field Appraiser Manual, the district's Personnel Policy Manual, and information related to a specified property. The district states it is releasing some of the requested information. The district claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.117, and 552.1175 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions the district claims and reviewed the submitted information.

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.

...

(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 district states, and provides documentation showing, prior to its receipt of the instant request, a lawsuit styled *Melissa Checkovage v. Bandera Central Appraisal District*, Cause No. CVOC-20-0000100, was filed and is currently pending against the district in the 198th District Court of Bandera County, Texas. Therefore, we agree litigation was pending on the date the district received the present request for information. The district also states the information at issue pertains to the substance of the lawsuit claims. Based on these representations and our review, we find the information at issue is related to the pending litigation. Therefore, we conclude the district may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.¹

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. *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 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

¹ As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining arguments against disclosure of the submitted information.

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,

Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/jm

Ref: ID# 844544

c: Requestor