



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 25, 2020

Mr. Kieran Hillis  
Public Information Coordinator  
Assistant General Counsel  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, Texas 78711

OR2020-29490

Dear Mr. Hillis:

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# 856006 [OOG ID 533-20].

The Office of the Governor (the "governor's office") received a request for e-mails between two named individuals during a specified period of time.<sup>1</sup> You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

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.

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<sup>1</sup> You state the governor's office sought and received clarification of the information requested. *See* Gov't Code § 552.222 (providing if request for information is unclear, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify request); *see also* *City of Dallas v. Abbott*, 304 S.W.3d 380, 387 (Tex. 2010) (holding that when a governmental entity, acting in good faith, requests clarification or narrowing of an unclear or overbroad request for information, the ten-day period to request an attorney general ruling is measured from the date the request is clarified or narrowed).

(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). 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 governor's office states several lawsuits were pending against the governor's office when it received the instant request for information.<sup>2</sup> You state the submitted information is related to the pending lawsuits because it pertains to the claims in the lawsuits. Based on your representations, the submitted documentation, and our review of the submitted information, we find litigation was pending when the governor's office received this request for information, and the submitted information is related to the pending litigation for the purposes of section 552.103. Therefore, the governor's office may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103(a) of the Government Code.<sup>3</sup>

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.

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<sup>2</sup> You state the pending lawsuits were *Hotze v. Abbott*, Case No. D-1-GN-20-002146 in the 98th Judicial District Court of Travis County, Texas; *Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Assoc. v. Abbott*, Case No. D-1-GN-20-002034, in the 459th Judicial District Court of Travis County, Texas; *Sanchez v. Brown*, Case No. 3:20-cv-00832 in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas; and *Renneberg, v. Abbott*, Case No. D-1-GN-20-004719 in the 53rd Judicial District Court of Travis County, Texas.

<sup>3</sup> As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of the submitted information.

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,

Paige Lay  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

PL/rm

Ref: ID# 856006

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)