



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 16, 2022

Mr. David Iglesias
Counsel for Leon County
Iglesias Law Firm, P.L.L.C.
605 Chase Drive, Suite 8
Tyler, Texas 75701

OR2022-04632

Dear Mr. Iglesias:

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# 931557.

Leon County (the "county"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified accident. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note some of the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022 provides, in relevant part:

(a) [T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

...

(3) information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the receipt or expenditure of public or other funds by a governmental body[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(3). The submitted information includes information in an account, contract, or voucher relating to the receipt or expenditure of funds by the county that is subject to section 552.022(a)(3). This information must be released unless it is made

confidential under the Act or other law. *See id.* You seek to withhold the information subject to section 552.022(a)(3) under section 552.103 of the Government Code. However, section 552.103 is discretionary in nature and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469, 475-76 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive section 552.103); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, the county may not withhold the information subject to section 552.022 under section 552.103 of the Government Code. However, because section 552.101 of the Government Code can make information confidential under the Act, we will consider your argument under this section for the information at issue. We will also consider your arguments for the information not subject to section 552.022.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov’t Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses information other statutes make confidential. Section 101.104 of the Civil Practice and Remedies Code provides:

- (a) Neither the existence nor the amount of insurance held by a governmental unit is admissible in the trial of a suit under [the Texas Tort Claims Act].
- (b) Neither the existence nor the amount of the insurance is subject to discovery.

Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 101.104. The county claims the information at issue is confidential under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 101.104 of the Civil Practice and Remedies Code. Section 101.104 prohibits the discovery and admission of insurance information during a trial under the Texas Tort Claims Act, chapter 101 of the Civil Practice and Remedies Code. *See City of Bedford v. Schattman*, 776 S.W.2d 812, 813-14 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 1989, orig. proceeding) (protection from producing evidence of insurance coverage under section 101.104 is limited to actions brought under Texas Tort Claims Act). However, section 101.104 does not make insurance information confidential for purposes of section 552.101 of the Government Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 551 at 3 (1990) (provisions of section 101.104 “are not relevant to the availability of the information to the public”). The Act differs in purpose from statutes and procedural rules providing for discovery in judicial proceedings. *See* Gov’t Code §§ 552.005 (Act does not affect scope of civil discovery), .006 (Act does not authorize withholding public information or limit availability of public information to public except as expressly provided by Act); *see also* Attorney General Opinion JM-1048 (1989); Open Records Decision No. 575 (1990) (*overruled in part by* Open Records Decision No. 647 (1996)) (section 552.101 does not encompass discovery privileges). Thus, we find section 101.104 of the Civil Practice and Remedies Code does not make the information at issue confidential for purposes of section 552.101 of the Government Code. Therefore, the county may not withhold the information subject to section 552.022 under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 101.104 of the Civil Practice and Remedies Code and it must be released.

Next, we note the submitted information contains a CR-3 accident report. Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses information subject to chapter 550 of the Transportation Code. Section 550.065 applies only to a written report of an accident required under section 550.061, 550.062, or 601.004. Transp. Code § 550.065(a)(1). Chapter 550 requires the creation of a written report when the accident resulted in injury to or the death of a person or damage to the property of any person to the apparent extent of \$1,000 or more. *Id.* §§ 550.061 (operator's accident report), .062 (officer's accident report). An accident report is privileged and for the confidential use of the Texas Department of Transportation or a local governmental agency of Texas that has use for the information for accident prevention purposes. *Id.* § 550.065(b). However, a governmental entity shall release an accident report in accordance with subsections (c) and (c-1). *Id.* § 550.065(c), (c-1). Section 550.065(c) provides a governmental entity shall release an accident report to a person or entity listed under this subsection. *Id.* § 550.065(c).

In this instance, the requestor is a person listed under section 550.065(c). Therefore, the requestor has a right of access to the submitted CR-3 accident report. Although the county asserts section 552.103 of the Government Code to withhold the information at issue, we note a statutory right of access prevails over the Act's general exceptions to public disclosure. *See, e.g.*, Open Records Decision Nos. 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exceptions to disclosure under the Act). Because section 552.103 is a general exception under the Act, the requestor's statutory right of access under section 550.065(c) prevails, and the county may not withhold the information at issue under section 552.103 of the Government Code. Thus, the county must release the submitted CR-3 accident report to the requestor in its entirety pursuant to section 550.065(c) of the Transportation Code.

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 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). A 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 (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. *See 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). *See* ORD 551.

To establish litigation is reasonably anticipated, a governmental body must provide this office “concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture.” *See* Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). Concrete evidence to support a claim litigation is reasonably anticipated may include, for example, the governmental body’s receipt of a letter containing a specific threat to sue the governmental body from an attorney for a potential opposing party. *See* Open Records Decision No. 555 (1990); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989) (litigation must be “realistically contemplated”). In addition, this office has concluded litigation was reasonably anticipated when the potential opposing party hired an attorney who made a demand for disputed payments and threatened to sue if the payments were not made promptly, or when an individual threatened to sue on several occasions and hired an attorney. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 346 (1982), 288 (1981). In Open Records Decision No. 638 (1996), this office stated a governmental body has met its burden of showing litigation is reasonably anticipated when it received a notice of claim letter and the governmental body represents the notice of claim letter is in compliance with the requirements of the Texas Tort Claims Act (“TTCA”), Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code, ch. 101. If a governmental body does not make this representation, the claim letter is a factor that this office will consider in determining whether a governmental body has established litigation is reasonably anticipated based on the totality of the circumstances. On the other hand, this office has determined if an individual publicly threatens to bring suit against a governmental body but does not actually take objective steps toward filing suit, litigation is not reasonably anticipated. *See* Open Records Decision No. 331 (1982). Further, the fact a potential opposing party has hired an attorney who makes a request for information does not establish litigation is reasonably anticipated. *See* Open Records Decision No. 361 (1983).

The county provides documentation showing, prior to the instant request for information, the county received a notice of claim and spoliation of evidence from the requestor, an attorney representing an individual involved in the specified accident. The county does not affirmatively represent to this office the notice of claim meets the requirements of the TTCA; therefore, we will only consider the notice of claim as a factor in determining whether the county reasonably anticipated litigation over the incident in question. Nevertheless, based upon our review of the submitted information, and the totality of the circumstances, we find the county reasonably anticipated litigation on the date it received the instant request. We further find the information at issue is related to the anticipated litigation for purposes of section 552.103. Therefore, the county may withhold the remaining information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

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 or anticipated 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).

In summary, the county must release the information we marked pursuant to section 552.022 of the Government Code. The county must release the submitted CR-3 accident report to the requestor in its entirety pursuant to section 550.065(c) of the Transportation Code. The county may withhold the remaining information under section 552.103 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,

Paige Lay
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PL/jxd

Ref: ID# 931557

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party
(w/o enclosures)