



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

July 20, 2004

Mr. Bret Jimerson  
Henslee, Fowler, Hepworth & Schwartz, L.L.P.  
309 West 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 1550  
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2004-6021

Dear Mr. Jimerson:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 205639.

The De Leon Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for the total dollar amount of legal fees expended by the district to date, plus any attorney's fees billed but not yet paid by the district in a specified lawsuit. You state that the submitted attorney billing invoices are the only documents that are responsive to the request. You claim that the information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.107 of the Government Code and is confidential under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.<sup>1</sup> We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You inform this office that you previously asked for a decision about the requested attorney fee bills in response to another request for information from the same requestor. In Open Records Letter No. 2004-5505 (2004), we concluded that the district could withhold portions of the requested attorney fee bills, which we marked, under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. You state that your instant arguments for withholding the submitted attorney fee bills are identical to the arguments this office addressed in Open Records Letter

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<sup>1</sup> You also claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.022 of the Government Code. However, this section is not an exception to disclosure but instead constitutes an illustrative list of types of information that are public and that may not be withheld unless "expressly confidential under other law." See Gov't Code § 552.022.

No. 2004-5505. Therefore, as the four criteria for a “previous determination” established by this office in Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) have been met, the district may withhold the portions of the submitted fee bills that we previously marked in accordance with Open Records Ruling No. 2004-5505 (2004).<sup>2</sup>

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body’s intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental

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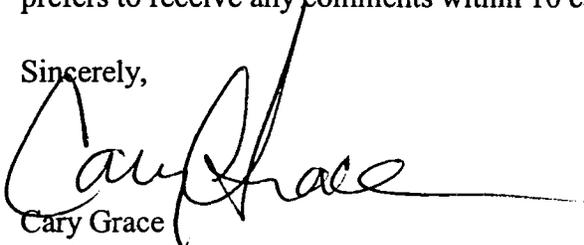
<sup>2</sup>The four criteria for this type of “previous determination” are 1) the records or information at issue are precisely the same records or information that were previously submitted to this office pursuant to section 552.301(e)(1)(D) of the Government Code; 2) the governmental body which received the request for the records or information is the same governmental body that previously requested and received a ruling from the attorney general; 3) the attorney general’s prior ruling concluded that the precise records or information are or are not excepted from disclosure under the Act; and 4) the law, facts, and circumstances on which the prior attorney general ruling was based have not changed since the issuance of the ruling. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001).

body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cary Grace", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Cary Grace  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

ECG/seg

Ref: ID# 205639

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Roy Johnson  
P.O. Box 52  
Desdemona, Texas 76445  
(w/o enclosures)