



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

July 12, 2005

Mr. James A. Martinez  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of El Paso  
2 Civic Center Plaza, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
El Paso, Texas 79901

OR2005-06142

Dear Mr. Martinez:

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# 227845.

The City of El Paso (the "city") received a request for the following: (1) invoices submitted to the city by a named law firm, or by any other outside attorney, related to the attorneys' work for the city related to the "ASARCO air permit renewal and contested case hearing," and (2) "[c]opies of any and all timesheets for any and all city attorneys' work" on the same issue. The requestor seeks information responsive to the request that now exists and that was not encompassed by a similar request, dated January 14, 2005, made by the requestor to the city. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code and protected under Rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

We begin by noting that some of the submitted information may be responsive to the requestor's January 14<sup>th</sup> request and, therefore, is not responsive to the instant request for information. To the extent that the submitted information is responsive to the January 14<sup>th</sup> request, the city need not release it in response to this request and this ruling will not address that information. To the extent the submitted information is not responsive to the January 14<sup>th</sup> request, we will address your claims for exception.

We note that the submitted information consists of attorney fee bills. Section 552.022 of the Government Code provides that "the following categories of information are public

information and not excepted from required disclosure under this chapter unless they are expressly confidential under other law: . . . (16) information that is in a bill for attorney's fees and that is not privileged under the attorney-client privilege[.]” Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(16). Therefore, information within these fee bills may only be withheld if it is confidential under other law.

Although sections 552.107 and 552.111, as discretionary exceptions, do not make information confidential for purposes of section 552.022, the Texas Supreme Court has held that the Texas Rules of Evidence are “other law” within the meaning of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328 (Tex. 2001); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 677 (2002), 676 (2002). Accordingly, we will address whether the submitted information is excepted under Texas Rule of Evidence 503.

Rule 503(b)(1) of the Texas Rules of Evidence provides the following:

A client has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent any other person from disclosing confidential communications made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the client:

- (A) between the client or a representative of the client and the client's lawyer or a representative of the lawyer;
- (B) between the lawyer and the lawyer's representative;
- (C) by the client or a representative of the client, or the client's lawyer or a representative of the lawyer, to a lawyer or a representative of a lawyer representing another party in a pending action and concerning a matter of common interest therein;
- (D) between representatives of the client or between the client and a representative of the client; or
- (E) among lawyers and their representatives representing the same client.

TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). A communication is “confidential” if not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication. *Id.* 503(a)(5).

Accordingly, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under Rule 503, a governmental body must do the following: (1) show that the document is a communication transmitted between privileged parties or reveals a confidential

communication; (2) identify the parties involved in the communication; and (3) show that the communication is confidential by explaining that it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and that it was made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 (2002). Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the entire communication is confidential under Rule 503 provided the client has not waived the privilege or the communication does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in Rule 503(d). *Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein); *In re Valero Energy Corp.*, 973 S.W.2d 453, 4527 (Tex. App.—Houston [14<sup>th</sup> Dist.] 1998, no pet.) (privilege attaches to complete communication, including factual information).

You state the submitted documents consist of “communications made between attorneys or by attorneys with their client or authorized representatives of the client for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services.” Thus, we understand you to assert that information within the fee bills at issue constitutes privileged attorney-client communications. Having considered your representations and reviewed the information at issue, we find that you have established that some of the submitted information, which we have marked, constitutes privileged attorney-client communications that may be withheld under Rule 503. But we find you have not established that the remaining information constitutes privileged attorney-client communications; therefore, the city may not withhold any of the remaining information under Rule 503.

In summary, the city may withhold the information we have marked under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. It must release the remaining information at issue pursuant to section 552.022 of the Government Code.

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

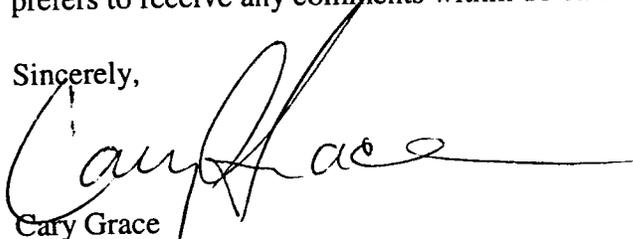
statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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 body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Tex. 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,



Cary Grace  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

ECG/jev

Ref: ID# 227845

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Vanessa Johnson  
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(w/o enclosures)