



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

October 4, 2005

Mr. Daniel L. Rentfro, Jr.  
The Rentfro Faulk Law Firm, L.L.P.  
185 East Ruben M. Torres Senior Boulevard  
Brownsville, Texas 78520-9136

OR2005-09001

Dear Mr. Rentfro:

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# 233691.

The Brownsville Navigation District of Cameron County (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for copies of all fee agreements between the district and three named individuals. You state that you have released some of the requested information, but claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

First, we note that the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. This section provides:

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:

...

(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). Accordingly, the submitted information must be released unless it is expressly made confidential under other law. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107. Section 552.107, which protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege, is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects the governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 6 (2002) (section 552.107 is not other law for purposes of section 552.022); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 522 (1989) (discretionary exceptions in general). As such, section 552.107 is not other law that makes information confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. Therefore, the district may not withhold the information subject to section 552.022 under section 552.107 of the Government Code. However, the Texas Supreme Court has held that "[t]he Texas Rules of Civil Procedure and Texas Rules of Evidence are 'other law' within the meaning of section 552.022." *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). The attorney-client privilege is found at rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. Thus, we will determine whether the submitted information is confidential under rule 503.

Rule 503(b)(1) 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 that the submitted information consists of confidential communications between the district and the district's outside counsel concerning the provision of legal services to the district. Having considered your representations and reviewed the information at issue, we find that you have established that this information constitutes privileged attorney-client communications that may be withheld under rule 503.

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).

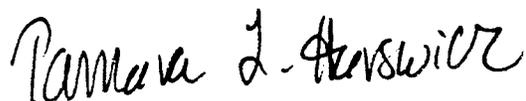
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records 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); *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 Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,



Tamara L. Harswick  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

TLH/sdk

Ref: ID# 233691

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Joel M. Androphy  
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(w/o enclosures)