



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

November 29, 2007

Mr. Christopher Gregg  
Gregg & Gregg, P.C.  
16055 Space Center Boulevard, Suite 150  
Houston, Texas 77062

OR2007-15687

Dear Mr. Gregg:

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 #295785.

The City of League City (the "city") received a request for all documents related to the Clear Creek Gun Range, a named individual, and a specified address. You state that you released all documents that are not excepted from disclosure under the Act to the requestor. You claim that the submitted e-mails are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You claim that the e-mails submitted as Exhibit A are excepted from disclosure under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. Section 552.107(1) protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002).

First, a governmental body must demonstrate that the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made "for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services" to the client governmental body. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating

professional legal services to the client governmental body. *In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, lawyer representatives, and lawyers representing another party in a pending action concerning a matter of common interest therein. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a confidential communication, *id.* 503(b)(1), meaning it was “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).

Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the intent of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, no writ). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain that the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

You state that Exhibit A contains e-mails between city attorneys and city employees, and that these communications were made in furtherance of the rendition of legal services and advice for the city. You further state that all of these communications were made in confidence, intended for the sole use of the city and its attorneys, and that they have not been shared or distributed to others. Based on our review of your representations and the submitted information, we find that you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to most of the e-mails at issue. Accordingly, these e-mails may be withheld under section 552.107.<sup>1</sup> We note, however, that one of the e-mails, which we have marked, is from an outside attorney not working for the city or your firm. Because you have not identified this third party as a consultant or other privileged party, we find that you have failed to demonstrate the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to this e-mail, and the city may not withhold it under section 552.107. *See* TEX. R. EVID. 511 (stating that a person waives a discovery privilege if he voluntarily discloses the privileged information).

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<sup>1</sup>As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure of these e-mails.

You assert that the remaining e-mail is also protected from disclosure by the attorney work product privilege. Section 552.111 excepts from disclosure “an interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency” and encompasses the attorney work product privilege found in rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. *City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351, 360 (Tex. 2000); Open Records Decision No. 677 at 4-8 (2002). Rule 192.5 defines work product as

(1) material prepared or mental impressions developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial by or for a party or a party’s representatives, including the party’s attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees, or agents; or

(2) a communication made in anticipation of litigation or for trial between a party and the party’s representatives or among a party’s representatives, including the party’s attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees or agents.

A governmental body seeking to withhold information under this exception bears the burden of demonstrating that the information was created or developed for trial or in anticipation of litigation by or for a party or a party’s representative. TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5; ORD 677 at 6-8. In order for this office to conclude that the information was made or developed in anticipation of litigation, we must be satisfied that: (a) a reasonable person would have concluded from the totality of the circumstances surrounding the investigation that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue; and (b) the party resisting discovery believed in good faith that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue and [created or obtained the information] for the purpose of preparing for such litigation. *See Nat’l Tank Co. v. Brotherton*, 851 S.W.2d 193, 207 (Tex. 1993). A “substantial chance” of litigation does not mean a statistical probability, but rather “that litigation is more than merely an abstract possibility or unwarranted fear.” *Id.* at 204; ORD 677 at 7.

You state that the e-mail at issue was created by the city and its attorneys in anticipation of litigation with the requestor’s client. However, you have not identified the third-party attorney who is involved in the communication. Therefore, you have failed to demonstrate that you have *not* waived the work product privilege by revealing this communication to a third party. Accordingly, we find that you have failed to demonstrate the applicability of the attorney work product privilege to the e-mail at issue, and it may not be withheld under section 552.111.

We note, however, that the e-mail contains an e-mail address subject to section 552.137 of the Government Code. Section 552.137 excepts from disclosure “an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body” unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail

address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c).<sup>2</sup> *See id.* § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail address contained in the remaining e-mail is not of a type specifically excluded by section 552.137(c). Accordingly, the city must withhold the e-mail address we have marked pursuant to section 552.137.

In summary, with the exception of the e-mail we have marked, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.107 of the Government Code. The city must withhold the e-mail address we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.

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).

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<sup>2</sup>The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception of the Government Code on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

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,



Reg Hargrove  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

RJH/eeg

Ref: ID# 295785

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. George A. Kurisky, Jr.  
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(w/o enclosures)