



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 18, 2008

Mr. D. Craig Wood
Walsh, Anderson, Brown, Schulze, & Aldridge, P.C.
P.O. Box 460606
San Antonio, Texas 78246

OR2008-15835

Dear Mr. Wood:

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# 328062.

The Northside Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for eight categories of information related to the district. You indicate that you will release information responsive to the first seven categories of the request. You claim that portions of the fee bills responsive to category eight of the request are excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code and privileged under Texas Rule of Evidence 503.¹ We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted fee bills.

We note that the submitted attorneys' fee bills are subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides for the required public disclosure of "information that is in a bill for attorney's fees and that is not privileged under the attorney-client privilege," unless the information is expressly confidential under other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(16). Although you seek to withhold information contained in the attorneys' fee bills under section 552.107 of the Government Code, that section is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See id.* § 552.007; Open Records Decision 676 at 10-11 (2002) (attorney-client

¹Although the district raises section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence, this office has concluded that section 552.101 does not encompass discovery privileges. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 1-2 (2002), 575 at 2 (1990).

privilege under Gov't Code § 552.107(1) may be waived), 665 at 2 n.5 (discretionary exceptions generally). As such, section 552.107 is not other law that makes information confidential for the purposes of section 552.022(a)(16). Therefore, the district may not withhold any of the information under section 552.107.

The Texas Supreme Court has held, however, 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, 336 (Tex. 2001). The attorney-client privilege also is found at Texas Rule of Evidence 503. Accordingly, we will consider your assertion of this privilege under rule 503 with respect to the information in the attorney fee bills. Rule 503(b)(1) provides as follows:

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).

Thus, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under rule 503, a governmental body must: (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. Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the information is privileged and confidential under

rule 503, provided the client has not waived the privilege or the document does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 503(d). *Pittsburgh Corning Corp. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, no writ).

You assert that the marked portions of the submitted attorneys' fee bills reveal communications between attorneys for the district and district officials. You state that these communications were made for the purposes of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the district, and that these communications have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted information, we agree that some of the information you have marked within the attorneys' fee bills reveals confidential communications between privileged parties. This information, which we have marked, is protected by the attorney-client privilege and may be withheld pursuant to rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. However, the remaining information you have marked does not document communications between privileged parties. Thus, this remaining information may not be withheld under rule 503. Accordingly, you may only withhold the information that we have marked under rule 503. The remaining responsive information must be released to the requestor.

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 file suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3). If the governmental body does not file suit over 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).

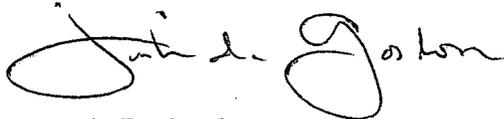
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin D. Gordon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "G".

Justin D. Gordon
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JDG/eeg

Ref: ID# 328062

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)