



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 2, 2010

Mr. Christopher B. Gilbert
Thompson & Horton, L.L.P.
711 Louisiana Street, Suite 2100
Houston, Texas 77002-2746

OR2010-01608

Dear Mr. Gilbert:

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# 369010.

The Katy Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified lawsuit. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code and privileged under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence and rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We note the submitted information is subject to section 552.022(a)(16) of the Government Code. This section provides in part:

(a) 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:

¹ Although you also raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with rules 503 and 192.5, 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).

(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). In this instance, the submitted information consists of attorney fee bills. Thus, the district must release this information pursuant to section 552.022(a)(16) unless it is expressly confidential under other law. Sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code are discretionary exceptions to disclosure that protect a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469, 475-76 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive section 552.103); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 677 at 10-11 (2002) (attorney work-product privilege under section 552.111 may be waived), 676 at 10-11 (2002) (attorney-client privilege under section 552.107(1) may be waived), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally). As such, sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 are not other laws that make information confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. Therefore, the district may not withhold the submitted fee bills under section 552.103, section 552.107, or section 552.111 of the Government Code. However, the Texas Supreme Court has held that the Texas Rules of Evidence and the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure are "other law" within the meaning of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Accordingly, we will consider your assertion of the attorney-client privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and the attorney work product privilege under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.

Texas Rule of Evidence 503 enacts the attorney-client privilege. 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). *See Pittsburgh Corning Corp. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, no writ).

You claim that the fee bills in their entirety are confidential under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. However, section 552.022(a)(16) of the Government Code provides that information “that is *in* a bill for attorney’s fees” is not excepted from required disclosure unless it is confidential under other law or privileged under the attorney-client privilege. *See Gov’t Code § 552.022(a)(16)* (emphasis added). This provision, by its express language, does not permit the entirety of an attorney fee bill to be withheld. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 676* (attorney fee bill cannot be withheld in entirety on basis it contains or is attorney-client communication pursuant to language in section 552.022(a)(16)), 589 (1991) (information in attorney fee bill excepted only to extent information reveals client confidences or attorney’s legal advice). This office has found that only information that is specifically demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege or made confidential by other law may be withheld from fee bills. *See ORD No. 676*.

You state that the submitted attorney fee bills document communications between the district’s attorneys and the district. You also state that the communications were intended to be and have remained confidential. You have identified the parties to the communications. We note, however, that you have failed to inform us how some of the parties you have identified are privileged parties for purposes of the attorney-client privilege. *See ORD 676* at 8 (governmental body must inform this office of identities and capacities of individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made; this office cannot necessarily assume that communication was made only among categories of individuals identified in rule 503); *see generally* Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977) (stating that predecessor to the Act places burden on governmental body to establish why and how

exception applies to requested information); *Strong v. State*, 773 S.W.2d 543, 552 (Tex. Crim. App. 1989) (burden of establishing attorney-client privilege is on party asserting it). Accordingly, the district may withhold the information we have marked on the basis of the attorney-client privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. However, we find that you have failed to demonstrate that the remaining information documents confidential communications that were made between privileged parties. Therefore, we conclude that Texas Rule of Evidence 503 is not applicable to the remaining information, and it may not be withheld on this basis.

Next, we address your argument under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5 for the remaining information you marked in the submitted attorney fee bills. Rule 192.5 encompasses the attorney work product privilege. For purposes of section 552.022 of the Government Code, information is confidential under rule 192.5 only to the extent that the information implicates the core work product aspect of the work product privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 677 at 9-10 (2002). Rule 192.5 defines core work product as the work product of an attorney or an attorney's representative, developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial, that contains the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of the attorney or the attorney's representative. *See* TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5(a), (b)(1). Accordingly, in order to withhold attorney core work product from disclosure under rule 192.5, a governmental body must demonstrate that the material was (1) created for trial or in anticipation of litigation and (2) consists of the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or an attorney's representative. *Id.*

The first prong of the work product test, which requires a governmental body to show that the information at issue was created in anticipation of litigation, has two parts. A governmental body must demonstrate that (1) 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 (2) the party resisting discovery believed in good faith that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue and conducted the investigation for the purpose of preparing for such litigation. *See Nat'l Tank 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. The second part of the work product test requires the governmental body to show that the materials at issue contain the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney's or an attorney's representative. *See* TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5(b)(1). A document containing core work product information that meets both parts of the work product test is confidential under rule 192.5, provided that the information does not fall within the scope of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 192.5(c). *See Pittsburgh Corning Corp.*, 861 S.W.2d at 427.

In this instance, we find you have failed to demonstrate that any of the remaining information in the submitted attorney fee bills consists of mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or an attorney's representative that were created for trial or in

anticipation of litigation. We, therefore, conclude that the district may not withhold any of the remaining information under rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

In summary, the district may withhold the information we have marked under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. The remaining information must be released.

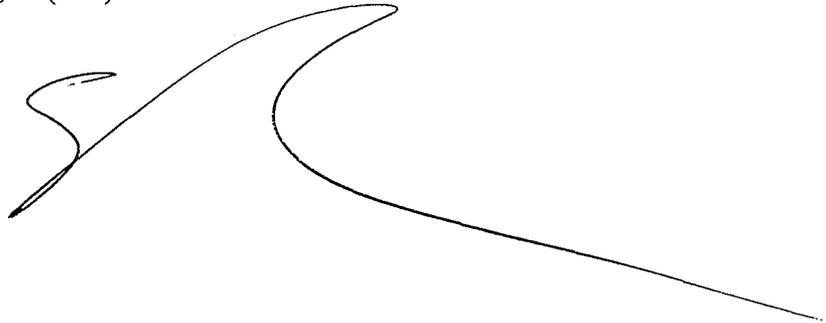
This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Chris Schulz
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division



CS/cc

Ref: ID# 369010

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)