



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

March 12, 2010

Mr. Christopher D. Taylor  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Waco  
P.O. Box 2570  
Waco, Texas 76702-2570

OR2010-03598

Dear Mr. Taylor:

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# 372529 (City Reference No. LGL-09-1332).

The City of Waco (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to a grievance filed against the requestor. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, and 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of the requested information.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, we note some of the requested information was the subject of a previous request for information, in response to which this office issued Open Records Letter No. 2010-02754. We presume that the facts and circumstances have not changed since the issuance of this prior ruling. To the extent the information at issue is identical to the information previously requested and ruled upon by this office, the city must withhold or release the information in accordance with Open Records Letter No. 2010-02754. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (so long as law, facts, and circumstances on which prior ruling was based have not

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<sup>1</sup>We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

changed, first type of previous determination exists where requested information is precisely same information as was addressed in a prior attorney general ruling, ruling is addressed to same governmental body, and ruling concludes that information is or is not excepted from disclosure). For the information not previously requested and ruled upon by this office, we will address your arguments.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses section 261.201 of the Family Code, which provides as follows:

(a) [T]he following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with [the Family Code] and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

(1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and

(2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). You contend that the submitted information is confidential under section 261.201. We find, however, that you have failed to demonstrate that any portion of the submitted information was used or developed in an investigation of child abuse or neglect under chapter 261 of the Family Code. *See id.* § 261.001(1) (defining "abuse" for purposes of Fam. Code ch. 261). We therefore conclude that the city may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.

Section 552.101 also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information if it (1) contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). The types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* included information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. *Id.* at 683. In *Morales v. Ellen*, 840 S.W.2d 519 (Tex. App.—El Paso 1992, writ denied), the court addressed the applicability of the common-law privacy doctrine to files of an investigation of allegations

of sexual harassment in an employment context. The information at issue concerns allegations of an employee of the city's library sexually harassing a member of the public, not a fellow employee or employees. Because this information does not concern sexual harassment in the employment arena, we find that *Ellen* is not applicable. Therefore, none of the submitted information may be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy and the court's holding in *Ellen*.

Common-law privacy also encompasses the types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation*, including information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. See 540 S.W.2d 668 at 683. Upon review, we find that the information we have marked must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Turning to your other exceptions, section 552.103 of the Government Code provides in part:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

....

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Gov't Code § 552.103(a), (c). A governmental body that claims section 552.103 has the burden of providing relevant facts and documentation sufficient to establish the applicability of this exception to the information that it seeks to withhold. To meet this burden, the governmental body must demonstrate that (1) litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date of its receipt of the request for information and (2) the information at issue is related to the pending or anticipated litigation. See *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210 (Tex. App.—Houston [1<sup>st</sup> Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.). Both elements of the test must be met in order for information to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.103. See Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990).

Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). To demonstrate that litigation is reasonably

anticipated, the governmental body must furnish concrete evidence that litigation involving a specific matter is realistically contemplated and is more than mere conjecture. *Id.* Concrete evidence to support a claim that litigation is reasonably anticipated may include, for example, the governmental body's receipt of a letter containing a specific threat to sue the governmental body from an attorney for a potential opposing party. Open Records Decision No. 555 (1990); *see* Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989) (litigation must be "realistically contemplated"). On the other hand, this office has determined that if an individual publicly threatens to bring suit against a governmental body, but does not actually take objective steps toward filing suit, litigation is not reasonably anticipated. *See* Open Records Decision No. 331 (1982). Further, the fact that a potential opposing party has hired an attorney who makes a request for information does not establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated. Open Records Decision No. 361 (1983).

For the purposes of section 552.103(a), litigation includes civil lawsuits and criminal prosecutions, as well as proceedings that are governed by the Administrative Procedure Act, chapter 2001 of the Government Code, or are otherwise conducted in a quasi-judicial forum. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 588 (1991), 474 (1987), 368 (1983), 336 (1982). In this instance, the requestor is the subject of the instant request for information. You assert that the city reasonably anticipates litigation because the requestor has filed a grievance. You have not informed us, however, that the requestor has actually threatened litigation or otherwise taken any concrete steps toward the initiation of litigation. *See* ORD 331. Further, you have not explained how the grievance process constitutes litigation of a judicial or quasi-judicial nature for purposes of section 552.103. *See generally* Open Records Decision No. 301 (1982) (discussing meaning of "litigation" under predecessor to section 552.103). Consequently, you have not established that the city reasonably anticipated litigation when it received the request for information. Accordingly, the city may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

Section 552.107(1) protects information that comes 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 a capacity other than that of attorney). Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. *See* TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). 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, 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 the information at issue is communications between city attorneys and city staff, all of whom you have identified. You state that these communications were made in furtherance of the rendition of legal services to the city, and you inform this office that these communications have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we agree that the information you have marked under section 552.107 constitutes privileged attorney-client communications. Accordingly, the city may withhold these communications under section 552.107 of the Government Code.

We note the remaining information contains an e-mail address.<sup>2</sup> Section 552.137 of the Government Code states that "an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body is confidential and not subject to disclosure under [the Act]," unless the owner of the e-mail address has affirmatively consented to its public disclosure. *Id.* § 552.137(a)-(b). The types of e-mail addresses listed in section 552.137(c) may not be withheld under this exception. *See id.* § 552.137(c). You do not state that the owner of the e-mail address has consented to its release. Therefore, the city must withhold the marked e-mail address under section 552.137, unless the owner consents to release.

Finally, we note that some of the remaining information at issue appears to be protected by copyright. A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information, but a custodian of public records must comply with copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are copyrighted. *See Attorney General Opinion JM-672* (1987). Thus, if a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit. *See Open Records Decision No. 550* (1990).

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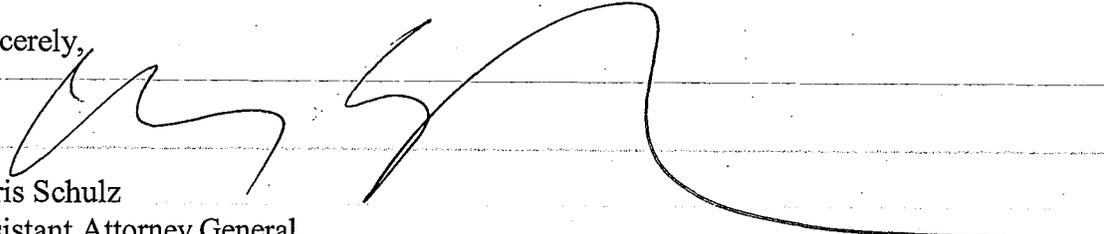
<sup>2</sup>The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception, such as section 552.137, on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 481* (1987), *480* (1987), *470* (1987).

In summary, to the extent the information at issue is identical to the information previously requested and ruled upon by this office, the city must withhold or release the information in accordance with Open Records Letter No. 2010-02754. The city must withhold the information we marked under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy. The city may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.107. The city must withhold the marked e-mail address under section 552.137, unless the owner consents to release.<sup>3</sup> The remaining information must be released, but any information protected by copyright must be released in accordance with copyright law.

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](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/rl

Ref: ID# 372529

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

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<sup>3</sup> We note this office recently issued Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009), a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold ten categories of information, including an e-mail address of a member of the public under section 552.137 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.