



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 13, 2010

Ms. Jacqueline Hojem
Public Information Officer and Senior Paralegal
Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County
P.O. Box 61429
Houston, Texas 77208

OR2010-06854

Dear Ms. Hojem:

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# 379418 (MTA No. 2010-0340).

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (the "authority") received a request for the following three categories of information: (1) correspondence during a specified period instructing the authority's print shop to convert documents into electronic form before shredding; (2) correspondence between two named individuals during a specified period; and (3) the authority's current document retention policy including the date the policy went into effect. You state the authority will release the information responsive to categories one and three, above, to the requestor. You claim the submitted correspondence responsive to category two is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.107, 552.111, and 552.137 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.107 of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. Gov't Code § 552.107(1). 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 Texas 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). 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, and lawyer representatives. 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, *id.*, 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 pet.). 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). We note that communications with third party consultants with which a governmental body shares a privity of interest are protected. Open Records Decision Nos. 464 (1987), 429 (1985).

You have identified the individuals in the e-mails you marked under section 552.107 as authority employees, attorneys who represent the authority, and representatives of those employees and attorneys. You represent these e-mails were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of legal services, and were intended to be, and have remained, confidential. Thus, based on your representations and our review, we conclude the e-mails you marked are protected by the attorney-client privilege and may be withheld under section 552.107 of the Government Code.¹

You claim a portion of the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under the deliberative process privilege encompassed by section 552.111 of the Government Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of section 552.111 is to

¹As our ruling is dispositive for this information, we need not address your remaining arguments against its disclosure.

protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990).

In Open Records Decision No. 615, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* ORD 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995). Additionally, section 552.111 does not generally except from disclosure purely factual information that is severable from the opinion portions of internal memoranda. *Arlington Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 37 S.W.3d 152 (Tex. App.—Austin 2001, no pet.); ORD 615 at 4-5.

You generally claim the remaining information you marked under the deliberative process privilege represents the advice, recommendations, or opinions of individuals evaluating and drafting a contract. Upon review, however, this information pertains staffing and scheduling problems, which are administrative in nature, surrounding the authority's attempt to finalize this contract. You have not explained how these communications reveal any individual's advice, opinion, or recommendation regarding the substance of the contract at issue or of any other matter of broad scope that affects the authority's policy mission. *See* ORD 631 at 3. Therefore, we conclude you have failed to demonstrate how the deliberative process privilege applies to this information, and it may not be withheld under section 552.111 of the Government Code. As you raise no other exceptions to disclosure of this information, it must be released.

You raise section 552.137 of the Government Code for a personal e-mail address in the remaining information. 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). *See* Gov't Code § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail address you indicated is not a type excluded by subsection (c). You inform this office the authority has not received consent to release the e-mail address

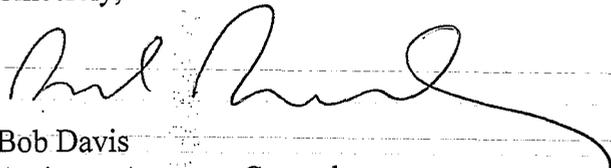
at issue. Accordingly, we agree the authority must withhold the e-mail address you indicated under section 552.137.²

In summary, the authority may withhold the information you marked under section 552.107 of the Government Code, and must withhold the e-mail address you indicated under section 552.137 of the Government Code. 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,



Bob Davis
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RSD/eeg

Ref: ID# 379418

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

²We 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 e-mail addresses of members of the public under section 552.137 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.