



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 9, 2010

Ms. Cynthia Villarreal-Reyna
Section Chief, Agency Counsel
Legal & Regulatory Affairs, MC 110-1A
Texas Department of Insurance
P.O. Box 149104
Austin, Texas 78714-9104

OR2010-08445

Dear Ms. Villarreal-Reyna:

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# 382029 (TDI# 102400).

The Texas Department of Insurance (the "department") received a request for sixteen categories of information pertaining to the requestor's employment and termination. You state the department has provided some of the requested information to the requestor. You inform us the department is withholding some of the remaining requested information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 402.092 of the Labor Code pursuant to the previous determination issued in Open Records Letter Ruling No. 2005-01938 (2005)¹. You claim the submitted notes and e-mails with attachments are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government

¹Open Records Letter No. 2005-01938 authorizes the department to withhold under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 402.092 of the Labor Code, without the necessity of requesting a decision under the Act, information in a Texas Workers' Compensation Commission investigative file maintained under section 413.002, section 413.0511, or section 413.0512 of the Labor Code, unless the information either is subject to the release provisions of section 402.092, section 413.0511, section 413.0513, or section 413.0514 of the Labor Code, or is claim file information subject to subsection 402.092(c) of the Labor Code. See Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (listing elements of second type of previous determination under section 552.301(a) of the Government Code).

Code.² We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information. We have also received and considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit written comments regarding availability of requested information).

Initially, we note you have marked portions of the submitted information as being non-responsive to the request for information. Furthermore, we note one of the submitted e-mails was created after the department received the request for information. Thus, this e-mail, which we have marked, is not responsive to the request. This decision does not address the public availability of the non-responsive information, and that information need not be released.

Next, the requestor contends the department did not comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting our decision and, thus, the submitted information is presumed public under section 552.302 of the Government Code. *See id.* § 552.302 (providing governmental body's failure to submit information required in section 552.301(e) results in legal presumption the requested information is public and must be released). The requestor asserts, and the department acknowledges, the requestor submitted separate requests for information to the department on March 13, 2010, and March 22, 2010, seeking different types of information. The requestor contends the department failed to comply with the statutory deadlines set forth in section 552.301 because the department did not request a ruling regarding the information at issue in the March 13 request in its request for a ruling submitted to this office on April 5, 2010. The department, however, states it provided all of the information responsive to the March 13 request to the requestor on March 29, 2010. *See* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible). Thus, because the department released all of the information at issue in the March 13 request, the department did not need to seek a ruling regarding that information and there were no procedural requirements of the Act to be violated with respect to the March 13 request.

Section 552.301(b) requires a governmental body to ask for a decision from this office and state which exceptions apply to the requested information by the tenth business day after receiving the request. Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Pursuant to section 552.301(e) of the Government Code, the governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving the request (1) general written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, (2) a copy of the written request for information, (3) a signed statement or sufficient evidence showing the date the governmental body received the written request, and (4) a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply

²We note, in your letter dated April 12, 2010, you withdrew your assertion under section 552.116 of the Government Code.

to which parts of the documents. *See id.* § 552.301(e). As previously noted, the department states it received the second request on March 22, 2010. Accordingly, the department's ten-business-day deadline was April 5, 2010, and the fifteen-business-day deadline was April 12, 2010. The department hand-delivered to this office its request for a ruling on April 5, 2010 and the information required by section 552.301(e) on April 12, 2010. Upon review, we find the department complied with the requirements of section 552.301 with respect to the March 22 request. *See id.* § 552.301(b), (e). Thus, we will address the department's claimed exceptions for the submitted information.

You claim the submitted information is excepted under section 552.103 of the Government Code, which 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.

Id. § 552.103(a), (c). A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body receives the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *See Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). The governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a). *See* ORD 551 at 4.

The question of whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *See* Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). To demonstrate litigation is reasonably anticipated, the governmental body must furnish concrete evidence litigation involving a specific matter is realistically contemplated and is more than mere conjecture. *Id.* Concrete evidence to support a claim 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 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).

You assert the department reasonably anticipates litigation pertaining to the requestor’s termination from employment with the department. You state the requestor has requested the department review her termination and has filed a complaint with the department. You have not, however, informed us the requestor has actually threatened litigation or otherwise taken any concrete steps toward the initiation of litigation. *See* ORD 331. Consequently, you have not established the department reasonably anticipated litigation when it received the request for information. Accordingly, the department may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

Section 552.111 of the Government Code 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.

TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5. A governmental body seeking to withhold information under this exception bears the burden of demonstrating the information was created or developed for trial or in anticipation of litigation by or for a party or a party’s representative. *Id.*; ORD 677 at 6-8. In order for this office to conclude the information was made or developed in anticipation of litigation, we must be satisfied: (a) a reasonable person would have concluded from the totality of the circumstances surrounding the investigation there was a substantial chance litigation would ensue; and (b) the party resisting discovery believed in good faith there was a substantial chance 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. In the case of a communication, a governmental body must show the communication was between a party and the party’s representatives. ORD 677 at 7-8.

As previously stated, a governmental body bears the burden of establishing the applicability of the work product privilege to information it seeks to withhold under section 552.111 of the Government Code. In this instance, the submitted notes, e-mails, and attachments pertain to the employment and termination of the requestor, as well as how to handle certain regulatory matters. Although you claim the submitted information is subject to the attorney work product privilege, you have failed to demonstrate how the information was created or developed for trial or in anticipation of litigation. Consequently, you have failed to demonstrate the applicability of the attorney work product privilege under section 552.111 of the Government Code to the submitted notes and e-mails with attachments, and the information may not be withheld on this basis.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code 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)-(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

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).

You state the e-mails and attachments you seek to withhold are communications between department attorneys and department staff that were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services. You also state the communications were made in confidence, and that confidentiality has been maintained. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the e-mails and attachments you seek to withhold. Thus, the department may withhold the e-mails and attachments, which we have marked, under section 552.107 of the Government Code.³

You assert portions of the remaining notes, e-mails, and attachments are 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 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 consisting 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 severable from the opinion portions of internal memoranda. *Arlington Indep.*

³As our ruling for this information is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure for portions of this information.

Sch. Dist. v. Tex. Attorney Gen., 37 S.W.3d 152 (Tex. App.—Austin 2001, no pet.); ORD 615 at 4-5.

This office has also concluded a preliminary draft of a document intended for public release in its final form necessarily represents the drafter's advice, opinion, and recommendation with regard to the form and content of the final document, so as to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 559 at 2 (1990) (applying statutory predecessor). Section 552.111 protects factual information in the draft that also will be included in the final version of the document. *See id.* at 2-3. Thus, section 552.111 encompasses the entire contents, including comments, underlining, deletions, and proofreading marks, of a preliminary draft of a policymaking document that will be released to the public in its final form. *See id.* at 2.

You contend the remaining e-mails and attachments contain communications between department staff regarding compliance with legal requirements, investigation techniques and strategy, and the handling of certain regulatory matters entrusted to the department. Based on your arguments, we find you have sufficiently demonstrated how some of the information at issue pertains to the department's policymaking processes. We also find this information contains the advice, recommendations, and opinions of department staff regarding these policy issues. Based on your arguments and our review, we find you have established the deliberative process privilege is applicable to the information we have marked. Accordingly, the department may withhold this information under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

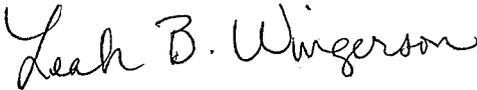
The remaining information at issue pertains to an employment complaint filed by the requestor and the requestor's employment termination. Thus, the notes, e-mails, and attachments at issue, which contain draft letters and talking points, pertain to administrative and personnel matters. As previously stated, the deliberative process privilege excepts communications pertaining to administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect a governmental body's policy mission. *See* ORD 631 at 3. In this instance, however, the information reflects it pertains to administrative and personnel issues involving only one department employee, and you have not explained how the information pertains to administrative or personnel matters of broad scope that affect the department's policy mission. Therefore, you have failed to demonstrate how the deliberative process privilege applies to the remaining information at issue. Accordingly, the remaining notes, e-mails, and attachments at issue may not be withheld under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

In summary, the department may withhold the information we have marked under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.⁴

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,



Leah B. Wingerson
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LBW/dls

Ref: ID# 382029

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

⁴We note the information being released includes the requestor's e-mail address that is generally confidential under section 552.137(a) of the Government Code, to which she has a right of access under section 552.137(b) of the Government Code, and the requestor's personal information that may be confidential under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code, to which she has a right of access under section 552.023(a) of the Government Code. If the department receives another request for this information from an individual other than this requestor, the department should again seek our decision.