



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

October 1, 2010

Mr. Reg Hargrove  
Assistant Attorney General  
Public Information Coordinator  
Office of the Attorney General  
P.O. Box 12548  
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

OR2010-14991

Dear Mr. Hargrove:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 394908 (PIR No. 10-28442).

The Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") received a request for information concerning Nelda Stark, the estates of Nelda C. Stark and H.J. Lutcher Stark, and the Nelda C. and H.J. Lutcher Stark Foundation. The OAG released some information but asserts the remainder is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the OAG's claimed exceptions to disclosure and have reviewed the submitted sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, we note the submitted attorney fee bills are subject to section 552.022(a)(16) of the Government Code, which 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 the OAG seeks to withhold this information under

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<sup>1</sup>We assume 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.

section 552.111, it is a discretionary exception and does not make information confidential. Open Records Decision Nos. 677 at 8 (2002) (Gov't Code § 552.111 is not other law for purposes of Gov't Code § 552.022), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally). Therefore, the OAG may not withhold the information under section 552.111. However, the Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure are other laws within the meaning of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). The attorney work product privilege is found at Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5. Accordingly, we will consider the OAG's assertion of this privilege for the information.

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 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. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, no writ).

The OAG explains it created the information in anticipation of litigation or for trial. After review of the information, we conclude the attorney fee bills do not contain the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or an attorney's representative. Thus, the OAG has not shown the attorney fee bills are core work product

that may be withheld under rule 192.5. Accordingly, the OAG must release the attorney fee bills.

Next, we consider the OAG's section 552.107 assertion for the remaining information. 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 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)(A), (B), (C), (D), (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 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).

The OAG explains the information it marked consists of or documents confidential communications among OAG attorneys, OAG staff, and a lawyer representing another party in a lawsuit concerning a matter of common interest. *See* RESTATEMENT (THIRD) OF THE LAW GOVERNING LAWYERS § 74 cmt. b (2000) (persons who have common interests may coordinate their positions without destroying privileged status of their communications with their lawyers). Moreover, the OAG explains the communications were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services, they were intended to be confidential, and their

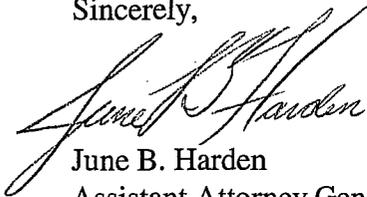
confidentiality has been maintained. After reviewing the OAG's arguments and the submitted information, we agree the communications constitute privileged attorney-client communications that the OAG may withhold under section 552.107. Because section 552.107 is dispositive, we do not address the OAG's attorney work product argument for this information.

In summary, the OAG may withhold the privileged attorney-client communications it marked under section 552.107 and must release the remainder.

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,



June B. Harden  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JBH/YHL/sdk

Ref: ID# 394908

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)