



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

November 3, 2010

Ms. Chris Elizalde  
Walsh, Anderson, Brown, Gallegos and Green, P.C.  
For Leander Independent School District  
P.O. Box 2156  
Austin, Texas 78768

OR2010-16690

Dear Ms. Elizalde:

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# 399727.

The Leander Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for records, documents, and invoices related to a specified legal matter.<sup>1</sup> You state the district has redacted student-identifying information pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g.<sup>2</sup> You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code and privileged under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence and

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<sup>1</sup>We note the requestor in this case made two separate requests for similar information on August 23, 2010 and September 9, 2010, and the district timely sought a ruling from our office on each request. Subsequently, on September 14, 2010, the requestor withdrew her first request for information and clarified her second request for information. Accordingly, this ruling will address only the requestor's September 14, 2010 clarification of her second request.

<sup>2</sup>The United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office (the "DOE") has informed this office that FERPA does not permit state and local educational authorities to disclose to this office, without parental consent, unredacted, personally identifiable information contained in education records for the purpose of our review in the open records ruling process under the Act. The DOE has determined that FERPA determinations must be made by the educational authority in possession of the education records. We have posted a copy of the letter from the DOE to this office on the Attorney General's website: <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/20060725usdoe.pdf>.

rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.<sup>3</sup> We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>4</sup>

Initially, we note, and you acknowledge, the submitted information is subject to section 552.022(a)(16) of the Government Code, which provides in part:

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:

...

(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 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code are discretionary exceptions to disclosure that protect a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See* 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 552.107 and 552.111 are not other law that make information confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. Therefore, the district may not withhold the submitted fee bills under section 552.107 or section 552.111 of the Government Code. However, the Texas Supreme Court has held 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, providing in relevant part:

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<sup>3</sup>Although you raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence and rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, 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). Thus, we will not address your claim that the submitted information is confidential under section 552.101 in conjunction with these rules.

<sup>4</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.

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 it is 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 information from disclosure under rule 503, a governmental body must: (1) show 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 the communication is confidential by explaining it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and 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 the entire "Description of Services" portions of the responsive fee bills are confidential under rule 503. However, section 552.022(a)(16) of the Government Code provides that information contained 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)*. This office has found that only information specifically demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege or made confidential by other law may be withheld from fee bills. *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) (predecessor to 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). Thus, under rule 503, the district may withhold only the parts of the submitted attorney fee bills that you specifically demonstrate consist of privileged communications.

You state the requested attorney fee bills contain confidential communications between the district's outside attorneys and certain named district employees. You state these communications were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the district. Further, you state the fee bills were intended to be, and have remained, confidential. Accordingly, the district may withhold the information we have marked on the basis of the attorney-client privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. We note, however, that you have failed to identify some of the parties to the communications in the attorney fee bills. *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). We find you have failed to demonstrate how the remaining information documents privileged attorney-client communications. Accordingly, none of the remaining information may be withheld under Texas Rule of Evidence 503.

Next, we address your argument under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5 for the remaining information 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 the information implicates the core work product aspect of the work product privilege. *See* ORD 677 at 9-10. 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 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 the information at issue was created in anticipation of litigation, has two parts. A governmental body must demonstrate (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 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.

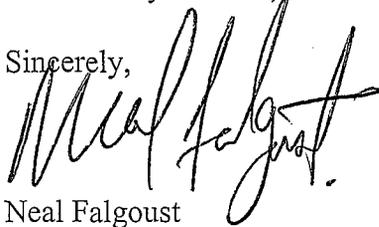
In this instance, we find you have failed to demonstrate that any of the remaining information in the attorney fee bills consists of mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or an attorney's representative created for trial or in anticipation of litigation. Therefore,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



Neal Falgoust  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

NF/eb

Ref: ID# 399727

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)