



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 6, 2010

Ms. Chris Elizalde
Walsh, Anderson, Brown, Gallegos, and Green, P.C.
P.O. Box 2156
Austin, Texas 78768

OR2010-18266

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# 401877.

The Leander Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for legal fees and legal activity information related to the requestor's child since the 2007-2008 school year. You claim some of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code and privileged under Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

You acknowledge the submitted information consists of attorney fee bills that are subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a)(16) provides information in a bill for attorney fees that is not protected under the attorney-client privilege is not excepted from required disclosure unless it is expressly confidential under other law; therefore, information within these fee bills may only be withheld if it is confidential under other law. Sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code are discretionary exceptions to disclosure that protect the governmental body's interests. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 677 at 10 (2002) (attorney work product privilege under section 552.111 may be waived), 676 at 6 (2002) (section 552.107 is not other law for purposes of section 552.022); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 522 (1989) (discretionary exceptions in general). 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 these sections. However, section 552.101 of the Government Code constitutes other law for purposes of section 552.022. In addition, the Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Evidence and the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure are "other law" that makes information expressly confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). We will therefore consider your arguments

under section 552.101, Texas Rule of Evidence 503, and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by other statutes. This office has concluded section 552.101 does not encompass discovery privileges. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 1-2, 575 at 2 (1990). Therefore, we conclude the district may not withhold any portion of the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with Texas Rule of Evidence 503 or Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.

You assert some of the requested information is excepted under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. Rule 503(b)(1) provides the following:

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 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).

Accordingly, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under rule 503, a governmental body must do the following: (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. *See* ORD 676. Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the entire communication is confidential under rule 503 provided the client has not waived the privilege or the communication does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 503(d). *Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein); *In re Valero Energy Corp.*, 973 S.W.2d 453, 457 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1998, no pet.) (privilege attaches to complete communication, including factual information).

You state the submitted fee bills documents communications between legal counsel for the district and district employees. You also assert these communications were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services and that the confidentiality of these communications has been maintained. Having considered your representations and reviewed the information at issue, we find you have established some of the submitted information, which we have marked, constitutes privileged attorney-client communications that the district may withhold under rule 503. However, you have failed to identify some of the parties to the communications in the submitted 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 not demonstrated any of the remaining information documents privileged attorney-client communications. Accordingly, the district may not withhold any of the remaining information under Texas Rule of Evidence 503.

You claim the remaining information at issue is privileged under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5. For purposes of section 552.022, information is confidential under rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure only to the extent the information implicates the core work product aspect of the work product privilege. ORD 677 at 9-10. Core work product is defined as the work product of an attorney or an attorney's representative developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial that contains the attorney's or the attorney's representative's mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories. 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 an attorney's or the attorney's representative's mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories. *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 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 prong of the work product test requires the governmental body to show

the documents at issue contains the attorney's or the attorney's representative's mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories. TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5(b)(1). A document containing core work product information that meets both prongs of the work product test is confidential under rule 192.5 provided the information does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 192.5(c). *Pittsburgh Corning Corp. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, no writ).

Upon review, we find you have not demonstrated any of the remaining information in the submitted attorney fee bills consists of mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or an attorney's representative that were created for trial or in anticipation of litigation. Therefore, the district may not withhold any of the remaining information under rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

To conclude, the district may withhold the information we have marked under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. The district must release the remaining information.

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,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/tf

Ref: ID# 401877

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)