



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 31, 2011

Ms. Michele Tapia
Assistant District Attorney
Dallas County
411 Elm Street, 5th Floor
Dallas, Texas 75202

OR2011-07620

Dear Ms. Tapia:

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# 419059.

Dallas County (the "county") received a request for the amount of money approved by the Dallas County Commissioner's Court (the "court") to settle a specified case. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.105, and 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information. We have also considered comments from the Dallas County Hospital District, d/b/a Parkland Health and Hospital System ("Parkland"). See Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit written comments regarding why information should or should not be released).

Section 552.107(1) 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, lawyer representatives, and a lawyer representing another party in a pending action and concerning a matter of common interest therein. See 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.). 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 court oversees Parkland’s budget and, in doing so, must approve any settlement agreements on behalf of Parkland. You state the submitted information constitutes a privileged communication between the county’s attorneys, the court, and Parkland discussing their common interest in the settlement of a specific condemnation lawsuit that is still pending. Based on these representations and our review, we agree the submitted information is protected by the attorney-client privilege, and the county may withhold it under section 552.107(1).¹

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

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address any of the remaining arguments against disclosure.

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/dls

Ref: ID# 419059

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Kenya S. Woodruff
Deputy General Counsel
Parkland Health & Hospital System
5201 Harry Hines Boulevard
Dallas, Texas 75235
(w/o enclosures)