



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

July 6, 2011

Ms. Zeena Angadicheril  
The University of Texas System  
201 West Seventh Street  
Austin, Texas 78701-2902

OR2011-09543

Dear Ms. Angadicheril:

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# 421543 (OGC# 136489).

The University of Texas System (the "system") received a request for e-mails, letters, or memos referring to research exchanged during a specified time period between members of the Board of Regents, the Chancellor, and the staff of the Office of Business Affairs.<sup>1</sup> You state the system has provided some of the requested information to the requestor. You also state the system will withhold personal e-mail addresses under section 552.137 of the Government Code pursuant to the previous determination issued to all governmental bodies in Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009).<sup>2</sup> You claim some of the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107, 552.111, and 552.1235 of

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<sup>1</sup>You state, and provide documentation showing, the system asked for and received clarification of a portion of the request. See Gov't Code § 552.222(b)(providing that if request for information is unclear, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify the request); see also *City of Dallas v. Abbott*, 304 S.W.3d 380, 387 (Tex. 2010) (holding that when a governmental entity, acting in good faith, requests clarification or narrowing of an unclear or overbroad request for public information, the ten-day period to request an attorney general ruling is measured from the date the request is clarified or narrowed)

<sup>2</sup>The previous determination issued in Open Records Decision No. 684 authorizes all governmental bodies to withhold ten categories of information, including e-mail addresses of members of the public under section 552.137, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.

the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>3</sup>

Initially, we note you have marked some information as non-responsive because it is outside the dates specified in the request. This ruling does not address the public availability of any information that is not responsive to the request, and the system is not required to release that information in response to the request.

Next, we note some of the submitted information is the subject of previous requests for information, in response to which this office issued Open Records Letter Nos. 2011-09146 (2011) and 2011-09323 (2011). In those decisions, we ruled, in part, that some of the requested information was excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107, 552.111, and 552.1235 of the Government Code. As we have no indication that the law, facts, or circumstances on which the prior ruling was based have changed, the system must continue to rely on those rulings as previous determinations and continue to withhold or release any previously ruled upon information in accordance with those prior rulings. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (so long as law, facts, and circumstances on which prior ruling was based have not changed, first type of previous determination exists where requested information is precisely same information as was addressed in prior attorney general ruling, ruling is addressed to same governmental body, and ruling concludes that information is or is not excepted from disclosure). To the extent the submitted responsive information was not previously ruled upon, we will consider your arguments against disclosure.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information that comes 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. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate 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. *See* 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. *See 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

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<sup>3</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 those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. See TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). 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.*, 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. See *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 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-mail strings and attachments you have marked consist of communications between system attorneys and system officials that were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services. You also state these communications were made in confidence, and that their 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 information at issue. Accordingly, the system may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.<sup>4</sup>

Section 552.111 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure “an interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency.” Gov’t Code § 552.111. Section 552.111 encompasses the deliberative process privilege. 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 that section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist 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

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<sup>4</sup>As our ruling for this information is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure for this information.

disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. The 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). Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events that are severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *See* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

This office has also concluded that a preliminary draft of a document that is 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-mail strings and attachments you have marked under section 552.111 consist of communications between system officials regarding various system policy issues. Based on your arguments and our review, we find you have sufficiently demonstrated how the information you have marked pertains to the system's policymaking processes. We also find portions of this information contain the advice, recommendations, and opinions of system officials regarding these policy issues. Furthermore, you state the draft document attachments will be released to the public in their final form. Based on your arguments and our review, we find you have established the deliberative process privilege is applicable to some of the information at issue, which we have marked. Accordingly, the system may withhold the information we have marked under section 552.111 of the Government Code. The remaining information at issue, however, does not reveal advice, recommendations, or opinions. Consequently, the remaining information you seek to withhold is not excepted under the deliberative process privilege and the system may not withhold that information under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

Section 552.1235 of the Government Code excepts "the name or other information that would tend to disclose the identity of a person, other than a governmental body, who makes a gift, grant, or donation of money or property to an institution of higher education[.]" Gov't Code § 552.1235(a). "Institution of higher education" is defined by section 61.003 of the Education Code. *Id.* § 552.1235(c). Section 61.003 of the Education Code defines an "institution of higher education" as any public technical institute, public junior college,

public senior college or university, medical or dental unit, public state college, or other agency of higher education as defined in this section. Educ. Code § 61.003(8). We agree the system and its component institutions qualify as “institutions of higher education” under section 61.003 of the Education Code. Further, because section 552.1235 of the Government Code does not provide a definition of “person,” we look to the definition provided in the Code Construction Act. *See* Gov’t Code § 311.005. “Person” includes corporation, organization, government or governmental subdivision or agency, business trust, estate, trust, partnership, association, and any other legal entity. *Id.* § 311.005(2).

You have marked the information you seek to withhold under section 552.1235. You contend the marked information identifies a donor to The University of Texas at Austin (the “university”). We note, however, the information at issue identifies an individual who had been considering making a donation to the university, but does not identify an actual donor to the university. Accordingly, we conclude the system may not withhold this information under section 552.1235 of the Government Code.

In summary, the system must continue to rely on Open Records Letter Nos. 2011-09146 and 2011-09323 as previous determinations and withhold or release any previously ruled upon information in accordance with those prior rulings. The system may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.107 of the Government Code. The system may withhold the information we marked under section 552.111 of the Government Code. The system must release the remaining submitted 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](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,



Tamara H. Holland  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

THH/bs

Ref: ID# 421543

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)