



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 11, 2011

Ms. YuShan Chang
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2011-09772

Dear Ms. Chang:

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# 423343 (GC No. 18502).

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for the following categories of information over specified time periods: (1) information pertaining to changes or revisions made to specified letters created by the requestor in her capacity as an employee; (2) information pertaining to specified work done by a named employee pertaining to the city's Office of the Inspector General ("OIG"); (3) specified tracking documents for "OIG letters;" (4) documents and statements pertaining to the requestor's unemployment claim filed with the Texas Workforce Commission ("TWC"); (5) all information referenced in the city's responses to the TWC and any information forming the basis of those responses; (6) information regarding communications pertaining to the requestor's health or disability; (7) written reprimands, warnings, or documentation given to any attorney with the city's legal department, including three specified attorneys and a specified assignment; (8) complaints filed against attorneys in the Labor and Employment Division or Labor, Employment and Civil Rights Division of the city's legal department; (9) specified daily sign-in logs; and (10) letters of suspension, termination, retirement, resignation in lieu of termination, indefinite suspension, or any type of release from employment pertaining to any

attorney in the city's legal department.¹ You state some of the requested information will be made available to the requestor. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.² We have also received and considered comments from the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

The city claims the submitted information excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code, which 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. 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

¹You state, and provide documentation showing, that the city sought and received clarification of the information requested. *See* Gov't Code § 552.222 (providing that if request for information is unclear, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify 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 over-broad 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).

²We 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.

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.). 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).

You state the submitted information consists of communications sent to, from, and among city attorneys and city employees in their capacity as clients. You also state that these communications were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the city, and you inform this office that these communications have remained confidential.

We note the requestor argues the city did not maintain the confidentiality of some of the requested information. The requestor asserts that the city has provided some of the requested information to the TWC and, thus, has waived its claim under the attorney-client privilege for this information. Pursuant to section 552.303 of the Government Code, we asked the city whether any of the requested documents were provided to the TWC, and, if so, to identify which documents were provided to the TWC.³ In response to our inquiry, the city identified the requested documents provided to the TWC, which the city is making available to the requestor pursuant to a cost estimate letter. As the documents made available to the TWC are not at issue in this ruling, we conclude the city has not waived its claim under the attorney-client privilege for the information at issue.

Accordingly, based on the city’s representations and our review, we agree that the submitted information constitutes privileged attorney-client communications. Thus, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.107 of the Government Code.

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

³See Gov’t Code § 552.303(c)-(d) (if attorney general determines that information in addition to that required by section 552.301 is necessary to render decision, written notice of that fact shall be given to governmental body and requestor, and governmental body shall submit necessary additional information to attorney general not later than seventh calendar day after date of receipt of notice).

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,



Jennifer Lynn Luttrall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLU/dls

Ref: ID# 423343

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)