



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 13, 2011

Ms. Elisabeth A. Donley
For Lewisville Independent School District
Law Offices of Robert E. Luna, P.C.
4411 North Central Expressway
Dallas, Texas 75205

OR2011-09950

Dear Ms. Donley:

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# 423690.

The Lewisville Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for seven categories of information related to probationary teachers.¹ You state the district does not maintain information responsive to a portion of the request.² You state some of the requested information will be made available to the requestor upon payment of applicable charges. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure

¹You inform us the district received clarification from the requestor regarding the request. See Gov't Code § 552.222(b) (stating if information requested is unclear to governmental body or if large amount of information has been requested, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify or narrow request, but may not inquire into purpose for which information will be used).

²We note that the Act does not require a governmental body to disclose information that did not exist at the time the request was received. *Econ. Opportunities Dev. Corp. v. Bustamante*, 562 S.W.2d 266 (Tex.Civ.App.—San Antonio 1978, writ dismissed); Open Records Decision No. 452 at 3 (1986).

pursuant to sections 552.101 and 552.107 of the Government Code.³ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.⁴

You have marked portions of the submitted information as not responsive to the request. This ruling does not address the public availability of any information that is not responsive to the request and the district is not required to release that information in response to the request.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov’t Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as section 551.104 of the Open Meetings Act, chapter 551 of the Government Code. Section 551.104 provides in part that “[t]he certified agenda or tape of a closed meeting is available for public inspection and copying only under a court order issued under Subsection (b)(3).” *Id.* § 551.104(c). We note the district is not required to submit a certified agenda or tape recording of a closed meeting to this office for review. *See* Open Records Decision No. 495 at 4 (1988) (attorney general lacks authority to review certified agendas or tapes of executive sessions to determine whether a governmental body may withhold such information from disclosure under statutory predecessor to Gov’t Code § 552.101). Such information cannot be released to a member of the public in response to an open records request. *See* Attorney General Opinion JM-995 at 5-6 (1988) (public disclosure of certified agenda of closed meeting may be accomplished only under procedures provided in Open Meetings Act). Section 551.146 of the Open Meetings Act makes it a criminal offense to disclose a certified agenda or tape recording of a lawfully closed meeting to a member of the public. *See* Gov’t Code § 551.146(a)-(b); *see also* ORD 495 at 4. You inform us a portion of the requested audio recording is of a closed meeting of the district. Based on your representation, we conclude the district must withhold the audio recording of the closed meeting under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 551.104(c) of the Government Code.⁵

³Although you also raise the attorney-client privilege under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence, we note section 552.107 is the proper exception to raise for your attorney-client privilege claim in this instance. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 (2002).

⁴We assume that the “representative sample” of information 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.

⁵We note this office issued Open Record Decision No. 684 (2009), a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold ten categories of information, including a tape of a closed meeting under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 551.104 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.

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 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 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 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, and lawyer representatives. 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. *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).

With the exception of the information you marked for release, you explain the responsive information in Exhibit B consists of confidential communications between attorneys for and representatives of the district that were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services. You state the communications were intended to be and have remained confidential. After reviewing your arguments and the submitted information, we agree, with the exception of the information you have marked for release, the responsive information in Exhibit B constitutes privileged attorney-client communications. We conclude the district may withhold this information under section 552.107 of the Government Code.

In summary, the district must withhold the audio recording of the closed meeting under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 551.104(c) of the Government Code. With the exception of the information you have marked for release, the district may withhold the responsive information in Exhibit B 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 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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Burnett".

Jennifer Burnett
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JB/dls

Ref: ID# 423690

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)