



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 1, 2011

Ms. Dolores Alvarado Hibbs
General Counsel
Texas Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 12847
Austin, Texas 78711

OR2011-16039

Dear Ms. Hibbs:

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# 434862 (TDA-PIR-684).

The Texas Department of Agriculture (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to the monitoring conducted by named monitors regarding the requestor's client's grants for operations in Harris and Galveston counties for fiscal year 2010 and 2011; information referenced in correspondence from the department to the requestor's client; and specified correspondence from the department to the requestor's client. You indicate the department has released some of the requested information. You claim that some of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you raise and reviewed the submitted information.

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

¹Although you raise Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5, we note that, in this instance, the proper exceptions to raise when asserting the attorney-client privilege and the work product privilege for information not subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code are sections 552.107 and 552.111, respectively. See Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 1-2 (2002), 677 (2002).

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 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 to only 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 to only 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, orig. proceeding). 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).

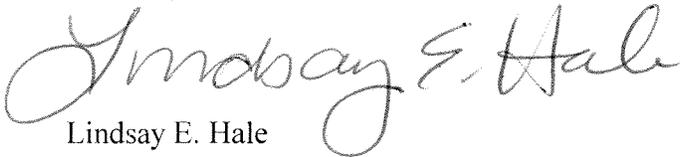
You state the submitted information constitutes communications amongst department attorneys, staff, executives, and outside contractors that were made for the purpose of providing legal services to the department. You further explain the outside contractors were hired by the department to perform compliance monitoring for the department. We understand the communications were intended to be confidential and you state they have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find the department may withhold the submitted information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.²

²As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.

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 "Lindsay E. Hale". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Lindsay E. Hale
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LEH/ag

Ref: ID# 434862

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)