



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 20, 2011

Ms. Bertha Bailey Whatley
Chief Legal Counsel
Fort Worth Independent School District
100 North University Drive, Suite 172
Fort Worth, Texas 76107

OR2011-18709

Dear Ms. Whatley:

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# 439476.

The Fort Worth Independent School District (the "district") received a request for all e-mails and other correspondence, from a specified time period, to and from nineteen named individuals pertaining to redistricting based on the 2010 United States Census. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.²

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

¹Although you also raise rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence, we note section 552.107 of the Government Code is the proper exception to raise when asserting the attorney-client privilege for information not subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 at 1-2 (2002).

²We assume 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 those records contain substantially different types of information than those submitted to this office.

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 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, orig. proceeding). 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 claim the information at issue is protected by section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. You state the e-mails consist of attorney-client communications that were made between outside counsel for the district and district employees and representatives for the purpose of rendering professional legal services to district. You state these communications were intended to be and remain confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the information at issue. Accordingly, the district may generally withhold the information at issue under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. We note, however, some of these privileged e-mail strings include e-mails to and from non-privileged parties that are separately responsive to the instant request. Consequently, to the extent these e-mails, which we have marked, exist separate and apart from the privileged e-mail string in which they were included, the district may not withhold them under section 552.107(1) of the

Government Code. If these e-mails do not exist separate and apart from the privileged e-mail strings in which they were included, the district may withhold them as privileged attorney-client communications under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.

You seek to withhold the remaining non-privileged e-mails, if they exist separate and apart from the privileged e-mail strings in which they were included, under section 552.111 of the Government Code, which excepts from 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. This exception encompasses the attorney work product privilege found in rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. *City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351, 360 (Tex. 2000); Open Records Decision No. 677 at 4-8 (2002). Rule 192.5 defines work product as:

(1) [M]aterial prepared or mental impressions developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial by or for a party or a party’s representatives, including the party’s attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees, or agents; or

(2) a communication made in anticipation of litigation or for trial between a party and the party’s representatives or among a party’s representatives, including the party’s attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees or agents.

TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5(a). A governmental body seeking to withhold information under this exception bears the burden of demonstrating the information was created or developed for trial or in anticipation of litigation by or for a party or a party’s representative. *Id.*; ORD 677 at 6-8. In order for this office to conclude that the information was made or developed in anticipation of litigation, we must be satisfied that:

a) a reasonable person would have concluded from the totality of the circumstances surrounding the investigation that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue; and b) the party resisting discovery believed in good faith that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue and [created or obtained the information] for the purpose of preparing for such litigation.

Nat’l Tank Co. v. Brotherton, 851 S.W.2d 193, 207 (Tex. 1993). A “substantial chance” of litigation does not mean a statistical probability, but rather “that litigation is more than merely an abstract possibility or unwarranted fear.” *Id.* at 204; ORD 677 at 7.

You argue the non-privileged e-mails constitute the work product of the district’s outside counsel. However, upon review, we find you have failed to demonstrate the non-privileged

e-mails consist of material prepared or mental impressions developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial by a party or a representative of a party. Accordingly, the district may not withhold any of the non-privileged e-mails under the work product privilege of section 552.111 of the Government Code.

We note the non-privileged e-mails contain information subject to section 552.137 of the Government Code.³ Section 552.137 excepts from disclosure “an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body” unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c). *See* Gov’t Code § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail addresses at issue are not excluded by subsection (c). Therefore, to the extent the non-privileged e-mails exist separate and apart from their otherwise privileged e-mail strings, the district must withhold the personal e-mail addresses we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owners affirmatively consent to their public disclosure.⁴

In summary, the district may generally withhold the information at issue under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. However, if the non-privileged e-mails, which we have marked, exist separate and apart from the privileged e-mail string in which they were included, the district may not withhold them under section 552.107(1). In this instance, the district must withhold the personal e-mail addresses we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owners affirmatively consent to their public disclosure, and must release the remaining 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, 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

³The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

⁴We note this office issued Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009), a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold ten categories of information, including e-mail addresses of members of the public under section 552.137 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.

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 black ink, appearing to read "Sean Nottingham".

Sean Nottingham
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SN/agn

Ref: ID# 439476

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)