



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 16, 2012

Ms. Tiffany N. Evans
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2012-07320

Dear Ms. Evans:

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# 453784 (GC# 19404).

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for Office of the Inspector General (the "OIG") case file number 111-1100228-001. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.107, 552.108, and 552.117 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part:

(a) [T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

(1) a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body, except as provided by Section 552.108[.]

Gov't Code §§ 552.022(a)(1). The submitted information consists of a completed investigation that is subject to subsection 552.022(a)(1). The city must release the completed investigation pursuant to subsection 552.022(a)(1) unless it is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code or is made confidential under the Act or other law. *See id.* § 552.022(a)(1). You seek to withhold some of the information subject to subsection 552.022(a)(1) under section 552.107 of the Government Code. However, section 552.107 is a discretionary exceptions and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 10-11 (2002) (attorney-client privilege under Gov't Code § 552.107(1) may be waived), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, the information subject to subsection 552.022(a)(1) may not be withheld under section 552.107 of the Government Code. However, the Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Evidence are "other law" within the meaning of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). We will therefore consider your assertion of the attorney-client privilege under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. As information subject to section 552.022(a)(1) may be withheld under section 552.108, and sections 552.101 and 552.117 make information confidential under the Act or other law, we will also consider your arguments under these exceptions.

Texas Rule of Evidence 503 enacts the attorney-client privilege. Rule 503(b)(1) provides as follows:

A client has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent any other person from disclosing confidential communications made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the client:

- (A) between the client or a representative of the client and the client's lawyer or a representative of the lawyer;
- (B) between the lawyer and the lawyer's representative;
- (C) by the client or a representative of the client, or the client's lawyer or a representative of the lawyer, to a lawyer or a representative of a lawyer representing another party in a pending action and concerning a matter of common interest therein;
- (D) between representatives of the client or between the client and a representative of the client; or
- (E) among lawyers and their representatives representing the same client.

TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). A communication is “confidential” if it is 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).

Thus, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under rule 503, a governmental body must: (1) show the document is a communication transmitted between privileged parties or reveals a confidential communication; (2) identify the parties involved in the communication; and (3) show the communication is confidential by explaining it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and it was made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client. Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the information is privileged and confidential under rule 503, provided the client has not waived the privilege or the document does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 503(d). *See Pittsburgh Corning Corp. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, no writ).

You state, and provide documentation showing, pursuant to City of Houston Executive Order 1-39 (Revised), the OIG is a division of the Office of the City Attorney and acts under that office’s supervision. You state the submitted information consists of communications between employees of the OIG in their capacities as attorneys and attorney representatives, and employees of the city in their capacities as clients and client representatives. You explain the information was created in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the city. You state the information at issue was not intended for release to third parties, and you state the city has maintained the confidentiality of the information at issue. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the submitted information. *See Harlandale Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Cornyn*, 25 S.W.3d 328 (Tex. App.—Austin 2000, pet. denied) (concluding attorney’s entire investigative report was protected by attorney-client privilege where attorney was retained to conduct investigation in her capacity as attorney for purpose of providing legal services and advice). Accordingly, the city may withhold the submitted information under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.¹

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,

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of the submitted information.

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 black ink, appearing to read "Claire Morris Sloan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "C".

Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/som

Ref: ID# 453784

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)