



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 24, 2012

Mr. W. Montgomery Meitler
Assistant Counsel
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2012-15162

Dear Mr. Meitler:

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# 466712 (ORR# 17944).

The Texas Education Agency (the "TEA") received a request for all information pertaining to the requestor's voluntary surrender of her teaching certification. You state the TEA has redacted certain information pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(a).¹ You claim the submitted information is privileged under rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. We have considered the submitted argument and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.²

¹The United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office (the "DOE") has informed this office FERPA does not permit state and local educational authorities to disclose to this office, without parental consent, unredacted, personally identifiable information contained in education records for the purpose of our review in the open records ruling process under the Act. The DOE has determined FERPA determinations must be made by the educational authority in possession of the education records. We have posted a copy of the letter from the DOE to this office on the Attorney General's website: <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/20060725usdoe.pdf>.

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.

Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part,

Without limiting the amount or kind of information that is public information under [the Act], the following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under [the Act] 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). In this instance, you acknowledge the requested information is subject to section 552.022(a)(1) because it consists of a completed investigation conducted by the TEA. You assert, however, the requested information is protected by rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. The Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure are "other law" within the meaning of section 552.022 of the Government Code. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Accordingly, we will consider your argument under rule 192.5 for the requested information.

For purposes of section 552.022, information is confidential under rule 192.5 only to the extent the information implicates the core work product aspect of the work product privilege. Open Records Decision No. 677 at 9-10 (2002). Core work product is defined as the work product of an attorney or an attorney's representative developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial that contains the attorney's or the attorney's representative's mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories. TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5(a), (b)(1). Accordingly, in order to withhold attorney core work product from disclosure under rule 192.5, a governmental body must demonstrate the material was (1) created for trial or in anticipation of litigation and (2) consists of an attorney's or the attorney's representative's mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories. *Id.*

The first prong of the work product test, which requires a governmental body to show the information at issue was created in anticipation of litigation, has two parts. A governmental body must demonstrate (1) a reasonable person would have concluded from the totality of the circumstances surrounding the investigation there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue, and (2) the party resisting discovery believed in good faith there was a substantial chance litigation would ensue and conducted the investigation for the purpose of preparing for such litigation. *See Nat'l Tank 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. The second prong of the work product test requires the governmental body to show the documents at issue contain the attorney's or the attorney's representative's mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories. TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5(b)(1). A

document containing core work product information that meets both prongs of the work product test is confidential under rule 192.5, provided the information does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 192.5(c). *Pittsburgh Corning Corp. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, no writ).

Furthermore, if a requestor seeks a governmental body's entire litigation file, the governmental body may assert the file is excepted from disclosure in its entirety because such a request implicates the core work product aspect of the privilege. See ORD 677 at 5-6. Thus, in such a situation, if the governmental body demonstrates the file was created in anticipation of litigation, this office will presume the entire file is within the scope of the privilege. Open Records Decision No. 647 at 5 (1996) (citing *Nat'l Union Fire Ins. Co. v. Valdez*, 863 S.W.2d 458, 461 (Tex. 1993)) (organization of attorney's litigation file necessarily reflects attorney's thought processes); see also *Curry v. Walker*, 873 S.W.2d 379, 380 (Tex. 1994) (holding "the decision as to what to include in [the file] necessarily reveals the attorney's thought processes concerning the prosecution or defense of the case").

You inform us the TEA "regulates and oversees all aspects of the certification, continuing education, and enforcement of standards of conduct for certified educators in Texas public schools under the authority of Chapter 21 of the Education Code." See Educ. Code §§ 21.031(a) (TEA shall regulate and oversee standards of conduct of public school educators), .041 (TEA shall propose rules providing for disciplinary proceedings). You further explain the TEA litigates enforcement proceedings under the Administrative Procedure Act (the "APA"), chapter 2001 of the Government Code. See *id.* § 21.047(b)(7); 19 T.A.C. § 249.3 *et seq.* You represent the requested information encompasses the TEA's entire litigation file with regard to its investigation of the requestor. You explain the file was created by attorneys, legal staff, and other representatives of the TEA in anticipation of litigation "because litigation is the ultimate resolution of all such investigations that are not settled or dismissed." Cf. Open Records Decision No. 588 (1991) (contested case under APA constitutes litigation for purposes of statutory predecessor to section 552.103 of the Government Code). Based on your representations and our review, we conclude the TEA may withhold the requested investigation records as attorney work product under rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

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 "Claire Morris Sloan".

Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/som

Ref: ID# 466712

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)