ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

April 24, 2013

Ms. Neera Chatterjee
Office of the General Counsel
The University of Texas System
201 West Seventh Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2902

OR2013-06771

Dear Ms. Chatterjee:

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# 485075 (OGC# 148474).

The University of Texas at Austin (the "university") received a request for all disciplinary letters, investigation reports, recommendations, findings, correspondence to or from the National Collegiate Athletic Association, and other records relating to consensual relationships involving any and all employees of the university's athletic department for a specified time period. You state the university is handling the release of certain responsive information. You also state the university will withhold student-identifying information pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), section 1232g of title 20 of the United States Code.[1] You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have

[1]The United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office (the "DOE") has informed this office that 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 that 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 Genera"s website: http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/20060725usdoe.pdf.

considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.[2]

Initially, we note you have marked some of the submitted information as non-responsive. This ruling does not address the public availability of non-responsive information, and the university is not required to release non-responsive information in response to this request.

Next, you state some of the responsive information was the subject of previous requests for information, as a result of which this office issued Open Records Letter Nos. 2013-03135 (2013), 2013-04074 (2013), and 2013-05321 (2013). As we have no indication the law, facts, or circumstances upon which the prior rulings were based have changed, the university must continue to rely on Open Records Letter Nos. 2013-03135, 2013-04074, and 2013-05321 as previous determinations and withhold or release the information at issue in accordance with those rulings. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (so long as law, facts, and circumstances on which prior ruling was based have not changed, first type of previous determination exists where requested information is precisely same information as was addressed in prior attorney general ruling, ruling is addressed to same governmental body, and ruling concludes information is or is not excepted from disclosure). To the extent the submitted information is not subject to Open Records Letter Nos. 2013-03135, 2013-04074, and 2013-05321, we will address your arguments.

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 exception encompasses information other statutes make confidential, such as section 51.971 of the Education Code, which provides, in part:

> (e) Information is excepted from disclosure under [the Act] if it is collected or produced:
>
> > (1) in a compliance program investigation and releasing the information would interfere with an ongoing compliance investigation[.]

Educ. Code § 51.971(e)(1). Section 51.971 defines a compliance program as a process to assess and ensure compliance by officers and employees of an institution of higher education with applicable laws, rules, regulations, and policies. *Id.* § 51.971(a)(1). You assert the

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

information you have marked pertains to an investigation into allegations of employee misconduct. You state the investigation is being conducted by the university's Associate Vice President for Legal Affairs. You further state the purpose of the review is to assess and ultimately ensure that the university has complied with all applicable law, rules, regulations, and policies. Based on your representations and our review, we agree the information at issue pertains to the university's compliance program for purposes of section 51.971. *See id.* § 51.971(a). You inform this office the information at issue pertains to an ongoing compliance investigation involving personnel matters by the university. You also represent release of the information at this time would interfere with, and potentially compromise, that investigation. Accordingly, we conclude the university must withhold the information you have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 51.971(e)(1) of the Education Code.

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 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, lawyer representatives, and a lawyer representing another party in a pending action and concerning a matter of common interest therein. *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 state the e-mails and attachments you have marked consist of attorney-client privileged communications between attorneys for the university, the University of Texas System, and university employees and officials, in their capacity as clients. You state these communications were made to facilitate the rendition of professional legal services to the university. You further state the communications have been kept 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 university may generally withhold the information you have marked under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. However, we note one of the otherwise privileged e-mail strings includes an e-mail received from a non-privileged party. Further, if the e-mail received from the non-privileged party is removed from the e-mail string and stands alone, it is responsive to the request for information. Therefore, if the non-privileged e-mail, which we have marked, is maintained by the university separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which it appears, then the university may not withhold the non-privileged e-mail under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.

To the extent the non-privileged e-mail is maintained by the university separate and apart, you also raise section 552.111 of the Government Code. Section 552.111 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. Section 552.111 encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of this exception is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, orig. proceeding); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1–2 (1990).

In Open Records Decision No. 615, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined that section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, opinions, recommendations, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* ORD 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995).

Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events that are severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *Arlington Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 37 S.W.3d 152 (Tex. App.—Austin 2001, no pet.); *see* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

Section 552.111 can also encompass communications between a governmental body and a third party, including a consultant or other party with a privity of interest. *See* Open Records Decision No. 561 at 9 (1990) (section 552.111 encompasses communications with party with which governmental body has privity of interest or common deliberative process). For section 552.111 to apply, the governmental body must identify the third party and explain the nature of its relationship with the governmental body. Section 552.111 is not applicable to a communication between the governmental body and a third party unless the governmental body establishes it has a privity of interest or common deliberative process with the third party. See ORD 561.

Upon review, we find you have failed to demonstrate how the university shares a privity of interest or common deliberative process with the non-privileged party in the e-mail at issue. Therefore, the university may not withhold this information under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

We note the e-mail at issue contains an e-mail address subject to section 552.137 of the Government Code. Section 552.137 of the Government Code 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).[3] Gov't Code § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail address at issue is not a type specifically excluded by section 552.137(c) of the Government Code. Accordingly, the university must withhold the e-mail address we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner of the e-mail address affirmatively consents to its disclosure.

In summary, the university must continue to rely on Open Records Letter Nos. 2013-03135, 2013-04074, and 2013-05321 as previous determinations and withhold or release the responsive information at issue in accordance with those rulings. The university must withhold the information you have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 51.971 of the Education Code. The university may generally withhold the information you have marked under section 552.107(1) of the

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[3]The 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).

Government Code. However, if the non-privileged e-mail, which we have marked, exists separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which it appears, then the university may not withhold the non-privileged e-mail under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. In that instance, the university must release the non-privileged e-mail but withhold the e-mail address we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner consents to its release.

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,

Nneka Kanu
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

NK/bhf

Ref: ID# 485075

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

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