



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 8, 2013

Mr. R. Brooks Moore
Managing Counsel, Governance
The Texas A&M University System
301 Tarrow Street, 6th Floor
College Station, Texas 77840-7896

OR2013-19572

Dear Mr. Moore:

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# 505467 (TAMU ID# 13-507).

Texas A&M University (the "university") received a request for e-mails, faxes, letters, documents, and other correspondence sent from named persons and offices during a specified time period (1) to any reporter or staff at The Eagle or (2) pertaining to a specified faculty member's transition. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. *See* Gov't Code § 552.107(1). 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. 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.

¹We 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.

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 only to 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 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. *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 e-mails are confidential communications made in furtherance of professional legal services rendered to the university. You state these communications contain legal advice and recommendations sent from university attorneys to university administrators. You also state these communications were intended to be confidential and that the confidentiality has been maintained. Thus, the university may generally withhold the submitted e-mails under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. We note, however, the e-mail string includes e-mails received from and sent to a non-privileged party. Furthermore, if the e-mails received from or sent to the non-privileged party are removed from the e-mail string and stand alone, they are responsive to the request for information. Therefore, if these non-privileged e-mails, which we have marked, are maintained by the university separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which they appear, then the university may not withhold these non-privileged e-mails under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.

To the extent the e-mails we have marked are maintained by the university separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which they appear, then some of the information at issue is subject to section 552.137 of the Government Code.² Section 552.137 excepts from disclosure “an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the

²The 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).

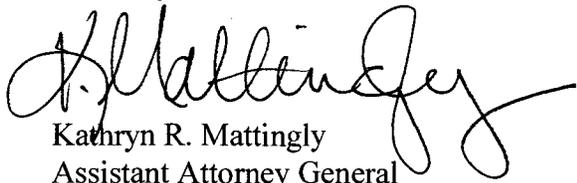
purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body," unless the owner of the e-mail address consents to its release or the e-mail address falls within the scope of section 552.137(c). *See* Gov't Code § 552.137(a)-(c). Section 552.137 is not applicable to the work e-mail address of an employee of a governmental body because such an address is not that of the employee as a "member of the public" but is instead the address of the individual as a government employee. The university must withhold the e-mail address we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner affirmatively consents to its public disclosure.³

In summary, the university may generally withhold the submitted e-mails under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. However, to the extent the e-mails we have marked are maintained separate and apart from the privileged e-mail string in which they appear, they may not be withheld under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. In that case, the university must withhold the e-mail address we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner affirmatively consents to its public disclosure, and release the remaining submitted information to the requestor.

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Kathryn R. Mattingly
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

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³We note Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009) is a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold ten categories of information, including an e-mail address of a member of the public under section 552.137 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general opinion.

Ref: ID# 505467

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)