



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

January 8, 2014

Mr. Darin Darby  
Counsel for the Comal Independent School District  
Escamilla & Poneck, LLP  
P.O. Box 200  
San Antonio, Texas 78291-0200

OR2014-00515

Dear Mr. Darby:

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# 510278.

The Comal Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for information regarding a bond issue, including 1) the pre-clearance by the Department of Justice for the election, 2) the public notice stating voting locations, 3) documents where the bond election is discussed by certain individuals, and 4) documents mentioning any of eight named individuals during a specified time period. You state the district is releasing most of the requested information. You further state the district 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.<sup>1</sup> You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under

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<sup>1</sup>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 General's website: <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/20060725usdoe.pdf>.

sections 552.105, 552.107, and 552.137 of the Government Code.<sup>2</sup> We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information, a portion of which consists of a representative sample.<sup>3</sup> We have also considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit written comments stating why information should or should not be released).

Section 552.105 excepts from disclosure information relating to:

- (1) the location of real or personal property for a public purpose prior to public announcement of the project; or
- (2) appraisals or purchase price of real or personal property for a public purpose prior to the formal award of contracts for the property.

*Id.* § 552.105. We note this provision is designed to protect a governmental body's planning and negotiating position with regard to particular transactions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 564 (1990), 357 (1982), 310 (1982). Information that is excepted from disclosure under section 552.105 that pertains to such negotiations may be excepted from disclosure so long as the transaction relating to that information is not complete. *See* ORD 310. But the protection offered by section 552.105 is not limited solely to transactions not yet finalized. This office has held that section 552.105 applies to leases as well as purchases of real estate. *See* Open Records Decision No. 348 (1982). A governmental body may withhold information "which, if released, would impair or tend to impair [its] 'planning and negotiating position in regard to particular transactions.'" Open Records Decision Nos. 357 at 3, 222 (1979). The question of whether specific information, if publicly released, would impair a governmental body's planning and negotiating position with regard to particular transactions is a question of fact. Accordingly, this office will accept a governmental body's good-faith determination in this regard, unless the contrary is clearly shown as a matter of law. *See* ORD 564. You generally state release of the information in Exhibit B "could damage the [d]istrict's current or future negotiation position with respect to the

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<sup>2</sup>Although it appears you also raise section 552.022 of the Government Code, that provision is not an exception to disclosure. Rather, section 552.022 enumerates categories of information that are not excepted from disclosure unless they are expressly confidential under the Act or other law. *See* Gov't Code § 552.022. Further, although you also raise rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence, we note section 552.107 is the proper exception to raise when asserting the attorney-client privilege for information that is not subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 at 3 (2002).

<sup>3</sup>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.

acquisition/lease of real property.” However, you do not inform us of any particular transaction with regard to which the release of the information at issue would impair the district’s negotiating position. Upon review of your argument and the submitted information, we find the district has failed to establish the applicability of section 552.105 of the Government Code to the information in Exhibit B, and the district may not withhold any of the information in Exhibit B on that basis.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. 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. ORD 676 at 6-7. 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. 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 to only 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 to only 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 information in Exhibit A consists of communications between privileged parties made for the purpose of the rendition of professional legal services to the district. You state the communications were not intended to be disclosed to third parties, and the

district has not waived its privilege with respect to the communications. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the information we have marked in Exhibit A. Thus, the district may generally withhold the e-mails we have marked in Exhibit A under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. We note, however, some of these e-mail strings include e-mails received from or sent to non-privileged parties. Furthermore, if the e-mails received from or sent to non-privileged parties are removed from the e-mail strings 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 district separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail strings in which they appear, then the district may not withhold these non-privileged e-mails under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. Upon review, we find the remaining information at issue was sent to or received by individuals you have not demonstrated are privileged parties. Accordingly, we find you have failed to demonstrate the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the remaining information in Exhibit A, and the district may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue under section 552.107(1) 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). *See* Gov’t Code § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail addresses we have marked in Exhibit C and in the non-privileged e-mails in Exhibit A are not excluded by subsection (c). Therefore, 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. However, we find the remaining e-mail addresses are excluded by section 552.137(c), and the district may not withhold any of the remaining e-mail addresses under section 552.137 of the Government Code.

In summary, the district may generally withhold the e-mails we have marked in Exhibit A under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. However, if the non-privileged e-mails, which we have marked, are maintained by the district separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail strings in which they appear, then the district may not withhold these non-privileged e-mails under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. The district must withhold the e-mail addresses we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owners consent to their disclosure. The district 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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl\\_ruling\\_info.shtml](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,



Kristi L. Wilkins  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

KLW/bhf

Ref: ID# 510278

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)