



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 17, 2014

Ms. Molly Cost
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Public Safety
P.O. Box 4087
Austin, Texas 78773-0001

OR2014-01125

Dear Ms. Cost:

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# 511415 (PIR No.13-4113).

The Texas Department of Public Safety (the "department") received a request for twenty categories of information pertaining to the department's use of aerial drones, remotely piloted vehicles, remotely piloted aircraft, unmanned aerials, unmanned aerial vehicles, and unmanned aerial systems. You state some of the requested information will be released to the requestor. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107, 552.108, and 552.111 of the Government Code. You also state release of some of the submitted information may implicate the interests of the Federal Aviation Administration (the "FAA"). Accordingly, you notified this third party of the request for information and of its right to submit arguments stating why its information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305 (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in certain circumstances). We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

An interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) of the Government Code to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should be withheld from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, we have not received comments from the FAA explaining why the information at issue should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude the FAA has a protected proprietary

interest in the information at issue. *See id.* § 552.110; Open Records Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (to prevent disclosure of commercial or financial information, party must show by specific factual evidence, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that release of requested information would cause that party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3. Accordingly, the department may not withhold Exhibit D on the basis of any proprietary interest the FAA may have in the information.

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 claim Exhibit A and Exhibit B are protected by section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. You state the information at issue consists of communications involving employees of the department and attorneys or attorney representatives for the department. You state the

communications were made in confidence for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the department and that these communications have remained 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 department may withhold Exhibit A and Exhibit B under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.¹

Section 552.108(b)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[a]n internal record or notation of a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that is maintained for internal use in matters relating to law enforcement or prosecution . . . if . . . release of the internal record or notation would interfere with law enforcement or prosecution[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.108(b)(1). Section 552.108(b)(1) is intended to protect “information which, if released, would permit private citizens to anticipate weaknesses in a police department, avoid detection, jeopardize officer safety, and generally undermine police efforts to effectuate the laws of this State.” *City of Fort Worth v. Cornyn*, 86 S.W.3d 320 (Tex. App.—Austin 2002, no writ). To demonstrate the applicability of this exception, a governmental body must meet its burden of explaining how and why release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement and crime prevention. Open Records Decision No. 562 at 10 (1990). This office has concluded section 552.108(b) excepts from public disclosure information relating to the security or operation of a law enforcement agency. *See, e.g.*, Open Records Decision Nos. 531 (1989) (release of detailed use of force guidelines would unduly interfere with law enforcement), 252 (1980) (section 552.108 designed to protect investigative techniques and procedures used in law enforcement), 143 (1976) (disclosure of specific operations or specialized equipment directly related to investigation or detection of crime may be excepted). Section 552.108(b)(1) is not applicable, however, to generally known policies and procedures. *See, e.g.*, ORDs 531 at 2-3 (Penal Code provisions, common law rules, and constitutional limitations on use of force not protected), 252 at 3 (governmental body failed to indicate why investigative procedures and techniques requested were any different from those commonly known). The determination of whether the release of particular records would interfere with law enforcement is made on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 409 at 2 (1984).

You state Exhibit C contains information concerning “the use of specialized equipment in investigation and detection of crime, as well as the techniques employed in the use of this equipment[.]” You explain release of the information at issue would allow wrong-doers to “evade the use of this equipment and impede the efforts of the [d]epartment to prevent criminal activity.” Based on your arguments and our review, we find you have demonstrated release of the information at issue would interfere with law enforcement. Thus, the department may withhold Exhibit C under section 552.108(b)(1) of the Government Code.

¹As our ruling is dispositive for this information, we need not address your remaining argument against its disclosure.

In summary, the department may withhold Exhibit A and Exhibit B under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code and Exhibit C under section 552.108(b)(1) of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.

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,



Megan G. Holloway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MGH/dls

Ref: ID# 511415

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Steve Pansky
Senior Air Traffic Control Analyst
Federal Aviation Administration
c/o Ms. Molly Cost
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Public Safety
P.O. Box 4087
Austin, Texas 78773-0001
(w/o enclosures)