



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 5, 2014

Ms. Jordan Hale
Assistant Attorney General
Public Information Coordinator
General Counsel Division
Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

OR2014-20121

Dear Ms. Hale:

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# 542468 (OAG PIR No. 14-39660).

The Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") received a request for any written agreement or statement defining or explaining certain expenses, including memoranda, documents, or e-mails. You state the OAG will release some of the requested information with redactions made pursuant to Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009)¹ and Open Records Letter No. 2011-18124 (2011).² You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have

¹Open Records Decision No. 684 is a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold specific categories of information without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision, including an e-mail address of a member of the public under section 552.137 of the Government Code.

²In Open Records Letter No. 2011-18124 this office issued the OAG a previous determination authorizing it to withhold an employee's user ID under section 552.139 of the Government Code without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office.

considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.³

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. 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. 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, lawyer representatives, and a lawyer representing another party in a pending action and concerning a matter of common interest therein. 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).

³This letter ruling assumes the submitted representative sample of information is truly representative of the requested information as a whole. This ruling does not reach, and therefore does not authorize, the withholding of any other requested information to the extent the other information is substantially different than that submitted to this office. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(e)(1)(D), .302; Open Records Decision Nos. 499 at 6 (1988), 497 at 4 (1988).

You state the submitted information consists of communications between and among attorneys and personnel of the OAG which were made for the purpose of providing legal services to the OAG. Additionally, you state the communications were not intended to be disclosed and they have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find the submitted information consists of privileged attorney-client communications the OAG may withhold under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.⁴

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,



Lindsay E. Hale
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LEH/akg

Ref: ID# 542468

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

⁴As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure.