



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 4, 2016

Mr. Jaron L. Hudgins
Counsel for Agua Special Utility District
Beatty Bangle Strama P.C.
400 West 15th Street, Suite 1450
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2016-22304

Dear Mr. Hudgins:

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# 628982.

The Agua Special Utility District (the "district"), which you represent, received two requests from different requestors for information pertaining to a specified investigation. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code and privileged under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence and rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.¹ We understand the district to assert the release of the submitted information may implicate the privacy interests of third parties. Accordingly, the district provides documentation showing it notified the third parties of the request for information and of their rights to submit arguments to this office as to why the requested information should not be released.² *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released). We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

¹Although you also raise section 552.022 of the Government Code, we note this section is not an exception to disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.022. We also note although you raise section 552.101 of the Government Code, you have not provided any arguments to support this exception. Therefore, we assume you have withdrawn your claim this section applies to the submitted information. *See id.* §§ 552.301, .302.

²As of the date of this letter, this office has not received comments from any third party explaining why the submitted information should not be released.

Initially, we note the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part:

(a) [T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

(1) a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body, except as provided by Section 552.108[.]

Id. § 552.022(a)(1). The submitted information consists of a completed investigation that is subject to section 552.022(a)(1). The district must release the completed investigation pursuant to section 552.022(a)(1) unless it is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code or is made confidential under the Act or other law. *See id.* You seek to withhold the submitted information under section 552.107 of the Government Code. However, section 552.107 is discretionary in nature and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 10-11 (2002) (attorney-client privilege under Gov't Code § 552.107(1) may be waived), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, the submitted information may not be withheld under section 552.107 of the Government Code. However, you also seek to withhold the submitted information under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence and rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. The Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Evidence and the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure are "other law" within the meaning of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). We will therefore consider your arguments under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence and rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

Texas Rule of Evidence 503(b)(1) provides as follows:

A client has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent any other person from disclosing confidential communications made to facilitate the rendition of professional legal services to the client:

(A) between the client or the client's representative and the client's lawyer or the lawyer's representative;

(B) between the client's lawyer and the lawyer's representative;

(C) by the client, the client's representative, the client's lawyer, or the lawyer's representative to a lawyer representing another party in a pending action or that lawyer's representative, if the communications concern a matter of common interest in the pending action;

(D) between the client's representatives or between the client and the client's representative; or

(E) among lawyers and their representatives representing the same client.

TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). A communication is "confidential" if it is 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).

Thus, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under rule 503, a governmental body must (1) show the document is a communication transmitted between privileged parties or reveals a confidential communication; (2) identify the parties involved in the communication; and (3) show the communication is confidential by explaining it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and it was made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client. Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the information is privileged and confidential under rule 503, provided the client has not waived the privilege or the document does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 503(d). *See Pittsburgh Corning Corp. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, orig. proceeding).

The district asserts the completed investigation must be withheld in its entirety under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. The district informs us the information at issue was communicated between attorneys for the district. The district explains the information was created in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the district. The district states the communications at issue have not been, and were not intended to be, disclosed to third parties. Based on these representations and our review, we find the district has demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the submitted information. *See Harlandale Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Cornyn*, 25 S.W.3d 328 (Tex. App.—Austin 2000, pet. denied) (attorney's entire investigative report protected by attorney-client privilege where attorney was retained to conduct investigation in her capacity as attorney for purpose of providing legal services and advice). Accordingly, the district may withhold the submitted information under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.³

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.

³As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure.

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,



Meagan J. Conway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MJC/akg

Ref: ID# 628982

Enc. Submitted documents

c: 2 Requestors
(w/o enclosures)

2 Third Parties
(w/o enclosures)