



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

June 15, 2007

Ms. Amanda M. Bigbee  
Henslee, Fowler, Hepworth, & Schwartz, LLP  
306 West 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 1045  
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2007-07642

Dear Ms. Bigbee:

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# 281174.

The Burleson Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received two requests from the same requestor for information related to the principal and assistant principal of Bransom Elementary, and the investigation into the school's special education department. You state that you will provide a portion of the requested information to the requestor. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, 552.103, 552.107, 552.111, 552.117, and 552.137 of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We note that the United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office informed this office that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), 20 U.S.C. § 1232(a), 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

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<sup>1</sup>Although you also initially raised sections 552.109 and 552.116 of the Government Code, you have not submitted any arguments regarding the applicability of these exceptions nor have you identified any information you seek to withhold under these exceptions. Therefore, we assume you no longer assert these exceptions to disclosure. See Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302.

the Act.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, state and local educational authorities that receive a request for education records from a member of the public under the Act must not submit education records to this office in unredacted form, that is, in a form in which “personally identifiable information” is disclosed. See 34 C.F.R. § 99.3 (defining “personally identifiable information”). You have submitted, among other things, unredacted education records for our review. Because our office is prohibited from reviewing these education records to determine the applicability of FERPA, we will not address FERPA with respect to these records. See 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(a)(1)(A); 34 C.F.R. § 99.3. Such determinations under FERPA must be made by the educational authority in possession of the education records.<sup>3</sup> However, we will consider your arguments against disclosure of the information at issue.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov’t Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. Section 551.104(c) of the Government Code provides that “[t]he certified agenda or tape of a closed meeting is available for public inspection and copying only under a court order issued under Subsection (b)(3).” Gov’t Code § 551.104. Thus, such information cannot be released to a member of the public in response to an open records request. See Open Records Decision No. 495 (1988). You argue that because a portion of the submitted information, which you have marked as Exhibit D, pertains to complaints which relate to grievance hearings that will be held in closed session, the information is confidential under section 551.104. However, records discussed or created in a closed meeting, other than a certified agenda or tape recording, are not made confidential by chapter 551 of the Government Code. See, e.g., Open Records Decision Nos. 605 at 2-3 (1992) (section 551.074 does not authorize governmental body to withhold names of applicants for public employment who were discussed in executive session), 485 at 9-10 (1987) (investigative report not excepted from disclosure simply by virtue of its having been considered in executive session). Because Exhibit D does not include a certified agenda or tape recording of a closed meeting, chapter 551 is inapplicable here; therefore, no portion of Exhibit D may be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that ground.

You further raise section 552.102 of the Government Code for Exhibit D. Section 552.102 excepts from disclosure “information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” Gov’t Code § 552.102(a). In *Hubert v. Harte-Hanks Texas Newspapers*, 652 S.W.2d 546 (Tex. App.—Austin 1983, writ ref’d n.r.e.), the court ruled that the test to be applied to information claimed to be protected under section 552.102 is the same as the test formulated by the Texas Supreme

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<sup>2</sup>A copy of this letter may be found on the Office of the Attorney General’s website at [http://www.oag.state.tx.us/opinopen/og\\_resources.shtml](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/opinopen/og_resources.shtml).

<sup>3</sup>In the future, if the district does obtain parental consent to submit unredacted education records, and the district seeks a ruling from this office on the proper redaction of those education records in compliance with FERPA, we will rule accordingly.

Court in *Industrial Foundation v. Texas Industrial Accident Board*, 540 S.W.2d 668 (Tex. 1976) for information claimed to be protected under the doctrine of common-law privacy as incorporated by section 552.101.

In *Industrial Foundation*, the Texas Supreme Court stated that information is excepted from disclosure if it (1) contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person and (2) is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found.*, 540 S.W.2d at 685. We note that information related to a government employee's job performance is generally a matter of legitimate public interest. *See, e.g.*, Open Records Decision Nos. 470 at 4 (1987) (job performance does not generally constitute public employee's private affairs). In this instance the information at issue consists of employee complaints and supporting information that pertains to the work behavior of public employees, and thus, is of legitimate public interest. Accordingly, common-law privacy is not applicable to the information in Exhibit D.

Section 552.107 of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. Gov't Code § 552.107. 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 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)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E). 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.* 503(b)(1), 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, no writ). 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 that the information in Exhibit E consists of confidential attorney-client communications between attorneys representing the district and district employees. Further, you explain that these communications were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the district. You also state that these communications have not been disclosed to third parties and that the confidentiality has not been waived. Based on these representations and our review, we conclude that the district may withhold the information in Exhibit E under section 552.107.

Section 552.111 excepts from disclosure “an interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency” and encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2* (1993). The purpose of section 552.111 is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, no writ); *Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2* (1990).

In *Open Records Decision No. 615*, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined that section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See ORD 615 at 5*. A governmental body’s policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body’s policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body’s policy mission. *See Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3* (1995). Additionally, section 552.111 does not generally except from disclosure purely factual information that is severable from the opinion portions of internal memoranda. *Arlington Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 37 S.W.3d 152 (Tex. App.—Austin 2001, no pet.); *ORD 615 at 4-5*.

You assert that the information in Exhibit C consists of exchanges of opinion, advice, and recommendations “regarding certain system wide decisions on staffing, student-teacher ratios, and other matters related to [the district’s] mission to educate general population and special education students of the district.” Upon review, we find that you have established that some of the information in Exhibit C consists of advice, opinion, or recommendations

related to district policy. We have marked the information that may be withheld under section 552.111. However, the remaining information in Exhibit C consists of factual information or fails to reveal the actual advice, recommendation, or opinion at issue. Therefore, none of the remaining information in Exhibit C may be withheld on this basis.

Section 552.111 also encompasses the attorney work product privilege found at rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. *See* TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5; *City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351, 360 (Tex. 2000); Open Records Decision No. 677 at 4-8 (2002). Rule 192.5 defines attorney work product as consisting of

(1) material prepared or mental impressions developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial by or for a party or a party's representatives, including the party's attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees, or agents; or

(2) a communication made in anticipation of litigation or for trial between a party and the party's representatives or among a party's representatives, including the party's attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees or agents.

TEX.R.CIV.P. 192.5. A governmental body that seeks to withhold information on the basis of the attorney work product privilege under section 552.111 bears the burden of demonstrating that the information was created or developed for trial or in anticipation of litigation by or for a party or a party's representative. *See id.*; ORD 677 at 6-8. In order for this office to conclude that information was created or developed in anticipation of litigation, we must be satisfied that

(a) a reasonable person would have concluded from the totality of the circumstances surrounding the investigation that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue; and (b) the party resisting discovery believed in good faith that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue and [created or obtained the information] for the purpose of preparing for such litigation.

*Nat'l Tank Co. v. Brotherton*, 851 S.W.2d 193, 207 (Tex. 1993). A "substantial chance" of litigation does not mean a statistical probability, but rather "that litigation is more than merely an abstract possibility or unwarranted fear." *Id.* at 204; ORD 677 at 7.

You state that the information in Exhibit E1 was created by the district in anticipation of litigation. You state that the information relates to pending employee grievance proceedings alleging wrongful and retaliatory termination under section 554 of the Government Code, the Whistleblower Act. *See* Gov't Code § 554.1 *et seq.* Section 554.006 provides, in relevant part, that an aggrieved party must initiate action under the grievance or appeal procedures of the employing state or local governmental entity before filing suit. *See* Gov't Code

§ 554.006(a). Based on your representations and the information at issue, we find that the district has established that the information in Exhibit E1 is attorney work product created in anticipation of litigation. Therefore, the information in Exhibit E1 may be withheld under section 552.111.

Section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure the current and former home addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body who request that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(1). Whether a particular piece of information is protected under section 552.117(a)(1) must be determined at the time the request for it is made. *See Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989)*. You state that the employee at issue elected to keep her information confidential prior to the district's receipt of the current request for information. Therefore, the district must withhold the information that you have marked in Exhibit B under section 552.117.

Section 552.137 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)*. Section 552.137 does not apply to a government employee's work e-mail address 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 e-mail addresses at issue are not a type specifically excluded by section 552.137(c). You do not inform us that a member of the public has affirmatively consented to the release of any e-mail address contained in the submitted materials. Therefore, the district must withhold the e-mail addresses you have marked in Exhibit A under section 552.137.

In summary, this ruling does not address the applicability of FERPA to the requested information. The district may withhold the information at issue in Exhibit E under section 552.107. The district may withhold the information we have marked in Exhibit C and all of the information in Exhibit E1 under section 552.111. The district must withhold the information that you have marked in Exhibit B under section 552.117. Finally, the district must withhold the e-mail addresses you have marked in Exhibit A under section 552.137. The remaining information must be released.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by

filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Office of the Attorney General at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Loan Hong-Turney  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

LH/sdk

Ref: ID# 281174

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Sally Ellertson  
Burlison Star Editor  
319 North Burlison Boulevard  
Burlison, Texas 76028  
(w/o enclosures)