



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 15, 2007

Ms. Karen Rabon
Assistant Attorney General
Public Information Coordinator
Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

OR2007-07645

Dear Ms. Rabon:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 280083.

The Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") received a request for Rhonda Pressley's employment records. The OAG states it will release most of the information but asserts the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107, 552.111, and 552.117 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the OAG's arguments and have reviewed the submitted sample of information.²

¹The OAG asserts the information is protected under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the attorney-client privilege pursuant to Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and the work product privilege pursuant to Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5. Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. It does not encompass the discovery privileges found in these rules because they are not constitutional law, statutory law, or judicial decisions. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 1-2 (2002).

²We 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.

Section 552.107(1) 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 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. *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 Texas 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)(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. *See 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).

The OAG explains the communications in Exhibit B are confidential communications among OAG attorneys and staff, and they are made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services. The OAG states the communications were intended to be confidential and that their confidentiality has been maintained. After reviewing the OAG’s arguments and the submitted information, we agree most of the communications in Exhibit B constitute privileged attorney-client communications that the OAG may withhold under section 552.107. However, the communications we marked either do not reflect privileged communications or they were not made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services. Thus, the OAG may not withhold the information we marked under section 552.107.

The OAG also contends Exhibit B constitutes attorney work product excepted from disclosure under section 552.111. Accordingly, we will consider whether the information we marked is excepted under section 552.111 as attorney work product. 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.” This section encompasses the attorney work product privilege found in rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. *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 work product as

- (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.

A governmental body seeking to withhold information under this exception 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. Tex. R. Civ. P. 192.5; ORD 677 at 6-8. In order for this office to conclude that the information was made 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.

The OAG explains the information in Exhibit B was created by OAG attorneys “in anticipation of various appeals of child support cases handled by the Title IV-D agency.” Upon review of the information, we find the documents were not created in anticipation of litigation but rather were created in response to a personnel matter. Furthermore, the marked information does not document privileged information because the information reflects communications with a non-privileged party or a factual recital of information already in the public domain. See *Nat’l Tank Co.*, 851 S.W.2d at 202-03 n.11 (attorney work product

privilege does not extend to facts acquired); *see also Leede Oil & Gas, Inc. v. McCorkle*, 789 S.W.2d 686, 687 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1990, no writ) (“neutral recitals” of fact may not be withheld as attorney work product); *see also* Tex. R. Evid. 511(1) (privilege waived if person voluntarily discloses any significant part of privileged matter). Therefore, the OAG may not withhold the information we marked under section 552.111 as attorney work product. Rather, the OAG must release the marked information in Exhibit B.

Lastly, the OAG asserts section 552.117 excepts the home address and home telephone number in Exhibit C from public disclosure. Section 552.117(a)(1) excepts from disclosure the home address, home telephone number, social security number, and family member information of a current or former employee of a governmental body who requests that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024. Whether a particular piece of information is protected by 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). The OAG explains the employee whose information is at issue timely elected confidentiality. Thus, the OAG must withhold the home address and home telephone number it marked in Exhibit C under section 552.117(a)(1).

In summary, except for the information we marked in Exhibit B, the OAG may withhold the communications under section 552.107. Also, the OAG must withhold the home address and home telephone number it marked in Exhibit C under section 552.117(a)(1). The OAG must release the remainder.

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,



Yen-Ha Le
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

YHL/sdk

Ref: ID# 280083

Enc: Marked documents

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(w/o enclosures)