



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

September 19, 2007

Mr. Christopher M. Jones  
Senior Counsel  
Texas Education Agency  
1701 North Congress Avenue  
Austin, Texas 78701-1494

OR2007-12214

Dear Mr. Jones:

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# 289457.

The Texas Education Agency (the "agency") received a request for the agency's entire investigative file regarding a specified educator. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office (the "DOE") has informed this office that the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), section 1232g of title 20 of the United States Code, 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 purposes of our review in the open records ruling process under the Act.<sup>1</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

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<sup>1</sup>A copy of this letter may be found on the attorney general's website, *available at* [http://www.oag.state.tx.us/opinopen/og\\_resources.shtml](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/opinopen/og_resources.shtml).

submitted for our review, among other information, redacted and unredacted education records. Because our office is prohibited from reviewing these education records, we will not address the applicability of FERPA to the information at issue.<sup>2</sup> Such determinations under FERPA must be made by the educational authority in possession of the education record. We will, however, address the applicability of the claimed exception to the submitted information.

Section 552.111 of the Government Code 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.” Gov’t Code § 552.111. 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.

TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5(a). 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. *Id.*; 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 (1) 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 (2) 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.

If a requestor seeks access to an entire litigation file, and a governmental body seeks to withhold the entire file and demonstrates that the file was created in anticipation of litigation,

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<sup>2</sup>In the future, if the agency does obtain parental consent to submit unredacted education records, and the agency seeks a ruling from this office on the proper redaction of those education records in compliance with FERPA, we will rule accordingly.

we will presume that the entire file is excepted from disclosure under the attorney work product aspect of section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 647 at 5 (1996) (citing *National Union Fire Insurance Co. v. Valdez*, 863 S.W.2d 458, 461 (Tex. 1993) (organization of attorney's litigation file necessarily reflects attorney's thought processes)).

You represent to this office that the requestor seeks access to the entire investigation file concerning a specified educator. You explain that the agency enforces standards of conduct for certified educators in Texas public schools under chapter 21 of the Education Code. *See* Educ. Code §§ 21.031(a), 21.041(b)(8). You further explain that the agency litigates enforcement proceedings under the Administrative Procedure Act (the "APA"), chapter 2001 of the Government Code, and rules adopted by the agency under subchapter B of chapter 21 of the Education Code. *See id.* § 21.047(b)(7); 19 T.A.C. § 249.46 *et seq.* You inform us that the submitted information was compiled in the course of conducting a pending investigation of an educator and constitutes the agency's litigation file. You further inform us that the file was created by attorneys, internal investigators, and other representatives of the agency in anticipation of litigation. *Cf.* Open Records Decision No. 588 (1991) (contested case under APA constitutes litigation for purposes of statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.103). Based on your representation that the request for information encompasses the agency's entire litigation file and that the submitted information was prepared in anticipation of litigation, we conclude that the agency may withhold the submitted information as attorney work product under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

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,



L. Joseph James  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

LJJ/eeg

Ref: ID# 289457

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Aaryn Landers Lamb  
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(w/o enclosures)