



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 2, 2009

Mr. Kevin B. Laughlin
Nichols, Jackson, Dillard, Hager & Smith, L.L.P.
Attorneys for City of Farmers Branch
1800 Lincoln Plaza
500 North Akard Street
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2009-07500

Dear Mr. Laughlin:

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# 344788.

The City of Farmers Branch (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for legal bills from any law firm employed by the city and bills from Androvett Legal Media & Marketing over a specified time period. You state that the city has released a portion of the requested information. You claim that portions of the remaining information are privileged under Texas Rules of Evidence 503 and Texas Rules of Civil Procedure 192.5. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, you acknowledge that the submitted information constitutes attorney's fee bills subject to section 552.022(a)(16) of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a)(16) provides for required public disclosure of "information that is in a bill for attorney's fees and that is not privileged under the attorney-client privilege," unless the information is expressly confidential under other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(16). The Texas Supreme Court has held that 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.

Rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence encompasses the attorney-client privilege and provides:

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

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

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

(C) by the client or a representative of the client, or the client's lawyer or a representative of the lawyer, to a lawyer or a representative of a lawyer representing another party in a pending action and concerning a matter of common interest therein;

(D) between representatives of the client or between the client and a representative of the client; or

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

TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). A communication is "confidential" if 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 that 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 that the communication is confidential by explaining that it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and that 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). *Pittsburgh Corning Corp. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, no writ).

You state that the information you have marked consists of communications between or among attorneys representing the city, the city, and the consulting firm of one of the law firms representing the city. You further state that the communications were made for the purpose of the rendition of professional legal services to the city. In addition, you indicate the communications were made in confidence and that confidentiality has been maintained.

Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we determine that the city may withhold the information we have marked on the basis of the attorney-client privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. We note, however, that you have failed to identify all of the parties to some of the communications or explain their relationship with the city. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 at 8 (governmental body must inform this office of identities and capacities of individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made; this office cannot necessarily assume that communication was made only among categories of individuals identified in rule 503). We also note that some of remaining information you have marked under rule 503 does not document a communication. Accordingly, you have failed to establish that the remaining information you have marked documents confidential communications that were made between privileged parties. Therefore, we conclude that Texas Rule of Evidence 503 is not applicable to the remaining information you have marked and it may not be withheld on this basis.

We next address your argument under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5 for the remaining information you have marked in the submitted attorney fee bill. Rule 192.5 encompasses the attorney work product privilege. For purposes of section 552.022 of the Government Code, information is confidential under rule 192.5 only to the extent that the information implicates the core work product aspect of the work product privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 677 at 9-10 (2002). Rule 192.5 defines core work product as the work product of an attorney or an attorney's representative, developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial, that contains the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of the attorney or the attorney's representative. *See* TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5(a), (b)(1). Accordingly, in order to withhold attorney core work product from disclosure under rule 192.5, a governmental body must demonstrate that the material was (1) created for trial or in anticipation of litigation and (2) consists of the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or an attorney's representative. *Id.*

The first prong of the work product test, which requires a governmental body to show that the information at issue was created in anticipation of litigation, has two parts. A governmental body must demonstrate 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 conducted the investigation for the purpose of preparing for such litigation. *See Nat'l Tank 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. The second part of the work product test requires the governmental body to show that the materials at issue contain the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney's or an attorney's representative. *See* TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5(b)(1). A document containing core work product information that meets both parts of the work product test is confidential under rule 192.5,

provided that the information does not fall within the scope of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 192.5(c). *See Pittsburgh Corning Corp.*, 861 S.W.2d at 427.

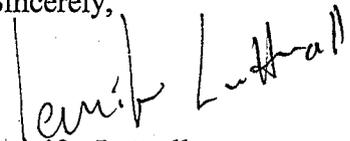
In this instance, we find that none of the remaining information you have marked in the submitted fee bills consists of mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or an attorney's representative that were created for trial or in anticipation of litigation. We therefore conclude that the city may not withhold any of the remaining information you have marked under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.

In summary, the city may withhold the information we have marked on the basis of the attorney-client privilege pursuant to Texas Rule of Evidence 503. The remaining information must be released to the requestor.

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.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, 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 must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General at (512) 475-2497.

Sincerely,


Jennifer Luttrall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JL/dls

Ref: ID# 344788

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)