



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 5, 2012

Ms. Rebecca Brewer
For the City of Frisco
Abernathy Roeder Boyd & Joplin P.C.
P.O. Box 1210
McKinney, Texas 75070-1210

OR2012-03273

Dear Ms. Brewer:

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# 447020.

The City of Frisco (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for a specified written statement, bills from a named individual for providing the written statement, and specified fee bills from the city's attorneys. You state the city has released some of the requested information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code, as well as privileged under Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.¹ We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note portions of the submitted information are subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. This section provides, in pertinent part:

¹Although you also raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5, this office has concluded section 552.101 does not encompass discovery privileges. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 1-2 (2002), 575 at 2 (1990). Further, although you also raise section 552.137 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 Therefore, we assume you have withdrawn your claim this section applies to the submitted information.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* Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302.

(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:

...

(3) information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the receipt or expenditure of public or other funds by a governmental body; [and]

...

(16) information that is in a bill for attorney's fees and that is not privileged under the attorney-client privilege[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(3), (16). The submitted documents include information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the receipt or expenditure of public or other funds, which we have marked, that is subject to subsection 552.022(a)(3). The submitted documents also include attorney fee bills, which are subject to subsection 552.022(a)(16). You claim section 552.103 for the information at issue. Section 552.103 of the Government Code is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See id.* § 552.007; Act of May 30, 2011, 82nd Leg., R.S., S.B. 602, §§ 3-21, 23-26, 28-37 (providing for "confidentiality" of information under specified exceptions); *Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469, 475-76 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive Gov't Code § 552.103); Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, the submitted information subject to section 552.022 may not be withheld under section 552.103 of the Government Code. However, 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 assertion of the attorney-client privilege under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence and the attorney work product privilege under rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure for the submitted fee bills. Because section 552.136 of the Government Code makes information confidential under the Act, we will also consider the applicability of section 552.136 for the information subject to section 552.022(a)(3).² Finally, we will consider your argument under section 552.103 of the Government Code for the submitted information not subject to section 552.022.

²The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

Texas Rule of Evidence 503 enacts the attorney-client privilege. Rule 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 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 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, no writ).

You assert portions of the submitted attorney fee bills must be withheld under rule 503. You indicate the information at issue contains privileged attorney-client communications between the city's attorneys and city employees and officials in their capacities as clients. You

indicate the communications at issue were made for the purpose of the rendition of legal services to the city. You further indicate the communications at issue have not been, and were not intended to be, disclosed to third parties. Thus, based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we find portions of the information at issue, which we have marked, constitute confidential attorney-client communications under rule 503. Accordingly, the city may withhold the information we marked within the submitted attorney fee bills pursuant to rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. However, the remaining information at issue documents communications with individuals who are not identified, and thus you have not demonstrated are clients, client representatives, lawyers, or lawyer representatives; or does not reveal privileged communications. Thus, you have not shown how the remaining information at issue documents privileged attorney-client communications, and none of the remaining information may be withheld under Texas Rule of Evidence 503.

We next address Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5 for the remaining information in the submitted attorney fee bills. 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 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 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 the information at issue was created in anticipation of litigation, has two parts. A governmental body must demonstrate (1) a reasonable person would have concluded from the totality of the circumstances surrounding the investigation there was a substantial chance litigation would ensue, and (2) the party resisting discovery believed in good faith there was a substantial chance 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 the materials at issue contain the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney 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 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.

You assert the submitted attorney fee bills contain attorney core work product that is protected by rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. Upon review, we find you have not demonstrated any of the remaining information 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 the city may not withhold any of the remaining information under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.

The documents subject to section 552.022(a)(3) of the Government Code include information that is subject to section 552.136 of the Government Code. Section 552.136 provides, "[n]otwithstanding any other provision of [the Act], a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential." Gov't Code § 552.136(b); *see id.* § 552.136(a) (defining "access device"). Accordingly, the city must withhold the routing and bank account numbers we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code.

You claim section 552.103 of the Government Code for the remaining submitted information. Section 552.103 provides in relevant part as follows:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

...

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Gov't Code § 552.103(a), (c). A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show section 552.103(a) is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *See Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, *writ ref'd n.r.e.*);

Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). A governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a). *See* ORD 551.

To establish litigation is reasonably anticipated for the purposes of section 552.103, a governmental body must provide this office with “concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture.” *See* Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). In the context of anticipated litigation in which the governmental body is the prospective plaintiff, the concrete evidence must at least reflect litigation is “realistically contemplated.” *See* Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989); *see also* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982) (finding investigatory file may be withheld if governmental body attorney determines it should be withheld pursuant to section 552.103 and litigation is “reasonably likely to result”). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *See* ORD 452 at 4.

You explain the city is involved in a dispute with Exide Technologies (“Exide”) concerning Exide’s emissions from its battery recycling plant. You state, and have provided documentation demonstrating, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, in cooperation with the city, is in the process of entering into an agreed order requiring Exide to control emissions from its operations. You inform us the order will incorporate federal regulations that would authorize a private lawsuit to enforce Exide’s compliance. You state the city may file suit to ensure Exide’s compliance. You also state the remaining information is related to the anticipated litigation. Based on your representations and documentation, our review of the submitted information, and the totality of the circumstances, we find the remaining information is related to litigation the city reasonably anticipated on the date it received the instant request for information. Accordingly, we find the city may withhold the remaining information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

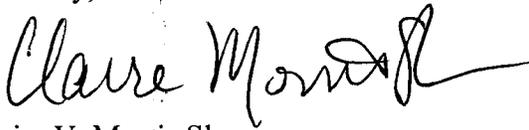
Generally, however, once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to all parties to the pending litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a) and must be disclosed. Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has been concluded. *See* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

In summary, the city must release the submitted attorney fee bills pursuant to section 552.022(a)(16) of the Government Code; however, in releasing the attorney fee bills, the city may withhold the information we have marked pursuant to rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. The city must also release the information we have marked pursuant to section 552.022(a)(3) of the Government Code; however, in releasing that information, the city must withhold the bank account and routing numbers we marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code. The city may withhold the remaining information, which we have marked, under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

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, toll free at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/som

Ref: ID# 447020

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)