



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 3, 2012

Mr. David L. Paschall
Goins Underkofler Crawford & Langdon, L.L.P.
1201 Elm Street, Suite 4800
Dallas, Texas 75720

OR2012-06460

Dear Mr. Paschall:

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# 453095.

The City of Red Oak (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for invoices and statements from September 2011 to February 1, 2012, relating to specified litigation. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code, and privileged under Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note some of the submitted documents are not responsive to the instant request for information, as they are dated before September 2011, outside the requested time period. This ruling does not address the public availability of any information that is not responsive to the request, and the city need not release that information in response to this request.

Initially, we note, and you acknowledge, the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code, which provides in part:

[T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

...

(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)(16). In this instance, the submitted information consists of attorney fee bills. Thus, the city must release this information pursuant to section 552.022(a)(16) unless it is confidential under the Act or other law. Section 552.103 of the Government Code is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See 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 No. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally). As such, section 552.103 does not make information confidential under the Act. Therefore, the city may not withhold the submitted fee bills under section 552.103. However, the Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Evidence and the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure are "other law." *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Accordingly, we will consider your assertion of the attorney-client privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and the attorney work product privilege under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.

Texas Rule of Evidence 503 encompasses the attorney-client privilege, providing in relevant part:

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 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 claim the submitted fee bills are confidential in their entirety under rule 503. However, section 552.022(a)(16) of the Government Code provides information “that is *in* a bill for attorney’s fees” is not excepted from required disclosure unless it is confidential under other law or privileged under the attorney-client privilege. *See Gov’t Code* § 552.022(a)(16) (emphasis added). This provision, by its express language, does not permit the entirety of an attorney fee bill to be withheld. *See also* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 (2002) (attorney fee bill cannot be withheld in entirety on basis it contains or is attorney-client communication pursuant to language in section 552.022(a)(16)), 589 (1991) (information in attorney fee bill excepted only to extent information reveals client confidences or attorney’s legal advice). Thus, under rule 503, the city may withhold only the parts of the submitted fee bills that you specifically demonstrate consist of privileged communications.

You also claim the highlighted portions of the submitted fee bills reveal privileged attorney-client communications. You have identified the parties to these communications. You state the communications were made in furtherance of the rendition of legal services to the city. You also represent the communications were intended to be confidential and have not been disclosed to third parties. Based on your representations and our review, we find the city has demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to some of the information at issue. Thus, the city may withhold this information, which we have marked, under rule 503. However, the remaining information you seek to withhold does not reveal communications. Accordingly, none of the remaining information may be withheld under rule 503.

Next, we address your argument under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5 for the remaining information you have highlighted in the submitted 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 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 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.

Having considered your arguments regarding the information at issue, we conclude you have not demonstrated that any of this information consists of core work product for purposes of rule 192.5. Therefore, the city may not withhold any of the remaining highlighted information under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.

In summary, the city may withhold the information we have marked under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. The remaining information must be released.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ana Carolina Vieira', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ana Carolina Vieira
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ACV/ag

Ref: ID# 453095

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)