



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 11, 2013

Ms. Holly B. Wardell
Eichelbaum, Wardell, Hansen, Powell & Mehl, P.C.
Counsel for the Killeen Independent School District
4201 West Parmer Lane, Suite A-100
Austin, Texas 78727

OR2013-21539

Dear Ms. Wardell:

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# 508097.

The Killeen Independent School District (the "district") received a request for any and all communications regarding a named student. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.²

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code 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 the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made

¹Although you also raise section 552.101 of the Government Code, you have not provided any argument to support this exception. Therefore, we do not address section 552.101. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(e)(1)(A), .302.

²We assume 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 those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

“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 Tex. 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). 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.*, 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, orig. proceeding). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain 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).

You claim the submitted information is protected by section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. You state the information at issue consists of communications involving employees of the district and attorneys for the district. You state the communications were made in confidence for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the district and that these communications have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the submitted information. Thus, the district may generally withhold the submitted information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. We note, however, portions of the e-mail strings at issue include e-mails sent to and received from a non-privileged party. Furthermore, if these e-mails are removed from the e-mail strings and stand alone, they are responsive to the request for information. Therefore, if these non-privileged e-mails, which we have marked, are maintained by the district separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail strings in which they appear, then the district may not withhold these non-privileged communications under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. In that instance, the non-privileged e-mails 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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Megan G. Holloway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MGH/dls

Ref: ID# 508097

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)