



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 23, 2014

Mr. Christopher Gregg
City Attorney for City of South Houston
Gregg & Gregg, P.C.
16055 Space Center Boulevard, Suite 150
Houston, Texas 77062

OR2014-01424

Dear Mr. Gregg:

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# 511825.

The City of South Houston (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for information regarding the payment of attorney fees or expenses by the city's police department regarding specified litigation. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part:

(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:

...

(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). The submitted information consists of attorney fee bills subject to subsection 552.022(a)(16). The city must release the information at issue unless it is made confidential under the Act or other law. *See id.* Although you seek to withhold the submitted attorney fee bills under sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111, these sections are discretionary exceptions to disclosure and do not make information confidential under the Act. *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); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 677 at 8 (2002) (attorney work product privilege under section 552.111 may be waived), 676 at 6 (2002) (Gov't Code § 552.107(1) is not other law for purposes of Gov't Code § 552.022), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally). Therefore, the city may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.103, section 552.107, or section 552.111 of the Government Code. However, the Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Evidence and Texas Rules of Civil Procedure are "other law" that make information expressly confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Thus, we will consider your assertion of the attorney-client privilege and the attorney work product privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5, respectively. Additionally, because section 552.136 of the Government Code makes information confidential under the Act, we will address its applicability to the information subject to section 552.022.¹

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;

¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision No. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

(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).

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* ORD 676 at 6-7. 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. *Id.* Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the entire communication 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). *Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein); *In re Valero Energy Corp.*, 973 S.W.2d 453, 457 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1998, orig. proceeding) (privilege extends to entire communication, including factual information).

You contend the attorney-client privilege is applicable to the entirety of the information in the submitted attorney fee bills. We note section 552.022(a)(16) provides that information “that is *in* a bill for attorney’s fees” is not excepted from disclosure unless the information is confidential under the Act or other law or protected by the attorney-client privilege. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.022(a)(16) (emphasis added). Thus, by its express language, section 552.022(a)(16) does not permit an attorney fee bill to be withheld in its entirety. *See* Open Records Decisions Nos. 676 (attorney fee bill cannot be withheld in its entirety on basis it contains or is attorney-client communication pursuant to language in Gov’t Code § 552.022(a)(16)), 589 (1991) (information in attorney fee bill is excepted only to extent it reveals client confidences or attorney’s legal advice).

You state the attorney fee bills contain communications between the city and its attorneys that were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services. You state the confidentiality of these communications has been maintained, and the communications have not been revealed to any third party. Based on your representations and our review, we find the city may withhold the information we have marked under

Texas Rule of Evidence 503.² However, some of the communications are with individuals you have not demonstrated are privileged parties. Further, some of the information at issue does not document a communication. Thus, we find you have not demonstrated the remaining information at issue reveals privileged attorney-client communications for the purposes of Texas Rule of Evidence 503. Accordingly, the remaining information at issue may not be withheld on that basis.

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. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, no writ).

You argue the remaining information at issue consists of privileged attorney work product. Upon review, we find you have not demonstrated any of the remaining information in the submitted attorney fee bills consists of mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal

²As our ruling is dispositive for this information, we need not address your remaining argument against its disclosure.

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 fee-bill information under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.

Section 552.136 of the Government Code 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"). Upon review, we find the city must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code.

In summary, the city may withhold the information we have marked under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. The city must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code. The city must release the remaining information.

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,



Kristi L. Wilkins
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KLW/bhf

Ref: ID# 511825

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)