



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

July 10, 2014

Mr. Marc Cayabyab  
Staff Attorney  
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
P. O. Box 13087  
Austin, Texas 78711-3087

OR2014-11887

Dear Mr. Cayabyab:

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# 528961 (PIR# 14-16714).

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (the "commission") received a request for copies of the complaints the requestor filed against the commission, correspondence between the requestor and the commission's investigators, the identities of the decision makers regarding the requestor's complaints, and copies of the commission's investigation reports regarding the requestor. You state the commission has released some information to the requestor. You claim portions of the submitted information are excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code and privileged under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the information at issue consists of completed reports and are, therefore, subject to section 552.022(a)(1) of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a)(1) provides for required public disclosure of "a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body[,]" unless the information is made confidential under this chapter or other law or is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). Although you claim these reports are subject to section 552.107(1) of the Government Code, this section is discretionary and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 10-11 (2002) (attorney-client privilege under section 552.107(1) may be waived), 665 at 2 n.5

(2000) (discretionary exceptions generally). Accordingly, the information at issue may not be withheld under section 552.107. However, the attorney-client privilege found in Texas Rule of Evidence 503 is “other law” for the purposes of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328 (Tex. 2001) (addressing applicability of Texas Rule of Evidence 503 to information encompassed by section 552.022). Therefore, we will consider your attorney-client privilege argument under Texas Rule of Evidence 503.

Rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence 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 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 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). Rule 503 generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege. *Pittsburgh Corning Corp. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, no writ).

You state the submitted investigation reports constitute communications between the commission's attorneys and the commission's representatives. You state the reports were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the commission. You explain the reports were only distributed internally within the commission between staff, upper management, and attorneys. You state the communications were intended to be, and have remained, confidential. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we conclude the commission may withhold the information at issue under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.

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](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,



Lauren Dahlstein  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

LMD/eb

Ref: ID# 528961

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)