



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 15, 2014

Ms. June Harden
Assistant Attorney General
Assistant Public Information Coordinator
General Counsel Division
Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

OR2014-14368

Dear Ms. Harden:

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# 533073 (OAG PIR No. 14-39025).

The Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") received a request for information pertaining to a specified application and any information sent to or received by two named individuals for a specified period of time regarding specified topics. You state the OAG will release some of the requested information. You claim the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

¹This letter ruling assumes the submitted representative sample of information is truly representative of the requested information as a whole. This ruling does not reach, and therefore does not authorize, the withholding of any other requested information to the extent the other information is substantially different than that submitted to this office. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(e)(1)(D), .302; Open Records Decision Nos. 499 at 6 (1988), 497 at 4 (1988).

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. Gov't Code § 552.107(1). 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. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate that the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made “for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services” to the client governmental body. 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. *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 a 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 to only communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. 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 to only 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. *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 that 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 state the information at issue consists of communications between attorneys in the OAG's Financial Litigation, Tax, and Charitable Trusts Division and the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts (the “comptroller's office”), one of the OAG's client agencies. You explain these communications were made for the purpose of providing legal services to the comptroller's office. Additionally, you state the communications were not intended to be disclosed and they have remained confidential. Thus, the OAG may generally withhold the information at issue under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. We note, however, two of the e-mail strings at issue include e-mails that were communicated with individuals you have not demonstrated are privileged parties. Furthermore, if the e-mails involving the

non-privileged parties 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 OAG separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail strings in which they appear, then the OAG may not withhold these non-privileged e-mails under section 552.107(1).

To the extent the non-privileged e-mails we have marked are maintained by the OAG separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail strings in which they appear, portions of the non-privileged e-mails are subject to section 552.137 of the Government Code.² Section 552.137 excepts from disclosure “an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body,” unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c). Gov’t Code § 552.137(a)-(c). Section 552.137 is not applicable to an institutional e-mail address, an Internet website address, the general e-mail address of a business, an e-mail address of a person who has a contractual relationship with a governmental body, or an e-mail address maintained by a governmental entity for one of its officials or employees. The e-mail addresses we have marked are not one of the types specifically excluded by section 552.137(c). Accordingly, the OAG must withhold the e-mail addresses we have marked under section 552.137 unless the owners of the addresses affirmatively consent to their release.

In summary, the OAG may generally withhold the information at issue under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. However, if the e-mails we have marked are maintained by the OAG separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail strings in which they appear, then, the OAG must release the marked non-privileged e-mails. However, in releasing the non-privileged e-mails, the OAG must withhold the e-mail addresses we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owners of the e-mail addresses at issue consent to their release.

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

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).

providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lindsay E. Hale". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L" and "H".

Lindsay E. Hale
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LEH/akg

Ref: ID# 533073

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)