



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 10, 2014

Ms. Shannon C. Francis
Assistant County Attorney
County of Williamson
405 M.L.K. Street, #7
Georgetown, Texas 78626

OR2014-20402

Dear Ms. Francis:

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# 543885.

Williamson County (the "county") received two requests from different requestors for information pertaining to a specified lawsuit. You claim some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code and privileged under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note, and you acknowledge, the submitted attorney fee bills are subject to section 552.022(a)(16) of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a)(16) provides for required public disclosure of "information that is in a bill for attorney's fees and that is not privileged under the attorney-client privilege," unless the information is expressly confidential under the Act or other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(16). You seek to withhold the information at issue under section 552.103 of the Government Code. However, section 552.103 is discretionary and does 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. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). As such, the county may not withhold any portion of 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” within the meaning of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Accordingly, we will address your claims of the attorney-client privilege and the attorney work product privilege under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence and rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, respectively.

Texas Rule of Evidence 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 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 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. 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 assert the portions of the submitted fee bills you have highlighted should be withheld under rule 503. You assert the submitted fee bills include privileged attorney-client communications between attorneys and outside counsel for the county and county employees and officials in their capacities as clients. You state the communications at issue were made for the purpose of the rendition of legal services to the county. You state the communications at issue have not been, and were not intended to be, disclosed to third parties. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we find the county has established most of the information you highlighted constitutes attorney-client communications under rule 503. However, we find you have not demonstrated how a portion of the information at issue, which we have marked, consists of a privileged attorney-client communication, and the county may not withhold the information we marked on that basis. Thus, except for the information we marked, the county may withhold the information you highlighted pursuant to rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.

We next address Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5 for the remaining information you highlighted in the submitted attorney 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 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 claim the remaining information you highlighted consists of attorney core work product that is protected by rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. Upon review, we find you have not demonstrated the information at issue contains the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or the attorney's representative that was developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial. We therefore conclude the county may not withhold the information at issue under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.

In summary, except for the information we marked for release, the county may withhold the information you highlighted pursuant to rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. The county 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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/som

Ref: ID# 543885

Enc. Submitted documents

c: 2 Requestors
(w/o enclosures)