



January 27, 2015

Mr. Orlando Juarez, Jr.
Counsel for the Clint Independent School District
J. Cruz & Associates, LLC
216 West Village Boulevard, Suite 202
Laredo, Texas 78041

OR2015-01551

Dear Mr. Juarez:

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# 551468.

The Clint Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for records of legal expenses pertaining to a specified lawsuit. You claim the requested information is privileged under Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.¹ We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

We note the submitted information includes attorney fee bills, which fall within the scope of section 552.022 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 confidential under the Act or other law. *See* Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(16). The Texas Supreme Court has held that the Texas Rules of Evidence and Texas Rules of Civil Procedure are "other law" that make information expressly confidential for purposes of section 552.022. *See In re City of*

¹Although you also raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5, this office has concluded section 552.101 does not encompass discovery privileges. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 1-2 (2002), 575 at 2 (1990). Accordingly, we do not address your arguments under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

Georgetown, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Accordingly, we will consider your assertion of the attorney-client privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and the attorney work product privilege under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5 for the submitted fee bills, as well as the remaining information.

Texas Rule of Evidence 503 encompasses the attorney-client privilege, providing in relevant part:

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).

Thus, in order to withhold 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). *See Pittsburgh Corning Corp. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, orig. proceeding).

You assert the submitted attorney fee bills must be withheld in their entirety under rule 503. However, section 552.022(a)(16) of the Government Code provides information “that is *in* a bill for attorney’s fees” is not excepted from required disclosure unless it is confidential under other law or privileged under the attorney-client privilege. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.022(a)(16) (emphasis added). This provision, by its express language, does not permit the entirety of an attorney fee bill to be withheld. *See also* Open Records Decisions Nos. 676 (attorney fee bill cannot be withheld in entirety on basis it contains or is attorney-client communication pursuant to language in section 552.022(a)(16)), 589 (1991) (information in attorney fee bill excepted only to extent information reveals client confidences or attorney’s legal advice). Accordingly, the district may not withhold the entirety of the submitted attorney fee bills under Texas Rule of Evidence 503.

You also assert portions of the submitted information are protected by the attorney-client privilege. You state the information at issue consists of privileged communications made in furtherance of professional legal services rendered to the district. You state these communications were intended to be and have remained confidential. However, you have failed to identify the parties to the communications in the submitted information. *See* ORD 676 at 8 (governmental body must inform this office of identities and capacities of individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made; this office cannot necessarily assume that communication was made among only categories of individuals identified in rule 503). *See generally* Gov’t Code § 552.301(e)(1)(A). Nevertheless, upon review, we are able to discern from the face of the documents that certain individuals are privileged parties. Accordingly, we conclude the district may withhold the information we marked under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. However, the remaining information at issue does not document a communication or consists of communications with parties whom you have not established are privileged parties for purposes of rule 503. Therefore, none of the remaining information at issue may be withheld under rule 503.

We next address Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5 for the remaining information 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.*, 861 S.W.2d at 427.

Upon review, we find the district has not demonstrated any of the remaining information at issue consists of mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or an attorney's representative that was created for trial or in anticipation of trial. Therefore, the district may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue under rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

We note some of the remaining information is subject to section 552.136 of the Government Code.² Section 552.136 states "[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, 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. Accordingly, we find the district must withhold the credit card numbers we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code.

In summary, the district may withhold the information we have marked on the basis of the attorney-client privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. The district must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code. The remaining information 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.

²The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Luttrall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jennifer Luttrall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JL/akg

Ref: ID# 551468

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)