



February 11, 2015

Ms. Heather Silver
Assistant City Attorney
City of Dallas
1500 Marilla Street, Room 7DN
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2015-02733

Dear Ms. Silver:

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# 553321.

The City of Dallas (the "city") received a request for all e-mails received by or sent by the city, including three specified city employees, regarding the death of a named firefighter. You state the city will release some of the requested information. You claim portions of the submitted information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.107, 552.108, and 552.111 of the Government Code.¹ You also state release of some of the information may implicate the interests of third parties. Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified the United States Department of Health and Human Services ("DHHS") and the Texas Department of Insurance ("TDI") of the request and of their right to submit arguments state why their information should not be released. *See Gov't Code* § 552.304 (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should or should not be released). We have received comments from DHHS and TDI. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted representative samples of information.²

¹Although you also raise Texas Rule of Evidence 503, we note the proper exception to raise when asserting the attorney-client privilege for information not subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code is section 552.107 of the Government Code. *See Open Records Decision No. 676 at 1-2 (2002).*

²We assume the "representative samples" of records submitted to this office are truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988).* This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

We note the information we have marked is not responsive to the instant request for information because it was created after the date the request for information was received by the city. This ruling does not address the public availability of non-responsive information, and the city is not required to release non-responsive information in response to this request.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov’t Code § 552.101. This office has repeatedly held that the transfer of confidential information between governmental agencies does not destroy the confidentiality of that information. *See* Attorney General Opinions H-917 (1976), H-836 (1974); Open Records Decision Nos. 561 (1990), 414 (1984), 388 (1983), 272 (1981), 183 (1978). These opinions recognize the need to maintain an unrestricted flow of information between state agencies. In Open Records Decision No. 561, we considered whether the same rule applied regarding information deemed confidential by a federal agency. In that decision, we noted the general rule that section 552 of title 5 of the United States Code, the federal Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), applies only to federal agencies and does not apply to records held by state agencies. ORD 561 at 6. Further, we stated information is not confidential when in the hands of a Texas agency simply because the same information is confidential in the hands of a federal agency. *Id.* However, in the interests of comity between state and federal authorities and to ensure the flow of information from federal agencies to Texas governmental bodies, we concluded, “when information in the possession of a federal agency is ‘deemed confidential’ by federal law, such confidentiality is not destroyed by the sharing of the information with a governmental body in Texas. In such an instance, [section 552.101] requires a local government to respect the confidentiality imposed on the information by federal law.” *Id.* at 7.

The city and DHHS inform this office a portion of the information in Exhibit D was provided to the city by the DHHS. DHHS informs this office that it considers the information at issue confidential under the provisions found in sections 552(b)(5) and 552(b)(7)(A) of title 5 of the United States Code. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(5) (agency may withhold inter-agency memoranda or letters not available by law to a party other than an agency in litigation with the agency), (7)(A) (agency may withhold information compiled for law enforcement purposes, but only to extent production of such law enforcement information could reasonably be expected to interfere with enforcement proceedings). Therefore, we conclude the city must withhold the information we have marked in Exhibit D under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with federal law.³

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information that comes within the attorney-client privilege. *See* 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. *See*

³As our ruling is dispositive for this information, we need not address your remaining argument against its disclosure.

Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate 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. *See* 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. *See 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 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 only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. *See* 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 only to 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. *See 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 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 claim the responsive information in Exhibit C is protected by section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. You state the information at issue consists of communications involving city attorneys and city staff. You state the communications were made in confidence for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the city and that these communications have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the information at issue. Accordingly, the city may withhold the responsive information in Exhibit C under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.

Section 552.111 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[a]n interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.111. Section 552.111 encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of this exception is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San*

Antonio, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.-San Antonio 1982, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990).

In Open Records Decision No. 615, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, orig. proceeding). We determined section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, opinions, recommendations, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* ORD 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995). Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events that are severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *Arlington Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 37 S.W.3d 152 (Tex. App.—Austin 2001, no pet.); *see* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

This office has also concluded that a preliminary draft of a document that is intended for public release in its final form necessarily represents the drafter's advice, opinion, and recommendation with regard to the form and content of the final document, so as to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 559 at 2 (1990) (applying statutory predecessor). Section 552.111 protects factual information in the draft that also will be included in the final version of the document. *See id.* at 2-3. Thus, section 552.111 encompasses the entire contents, including comments, underlining, deletions, and proofreading marks, of a preliminary draft of a policymaking document that will be released to the public in its final form. *See id.* at 2.

Section 552.111 can also encompass communications between a governmental body and a third-party, including a consultant or other party with a privity of interest. *See* Open Records Decision No. 561 at 9 (1990) (section 552.111 encompasses communications with party with which governmental body has privity of interest or common deliberative process). For section 552.111 to apply, the governmental body must identify the third party and explain the nature of its relationship with the governmental body. Section 552.111 is not applicable to a communication between the governmental body and a third party unless the governmental body establishes it has a privity of interest or common deliberative process with the third party. *See* ORD 561 at 9.

You assert the remaining information in Exhibit D consists of communications between the city, DHHS, and TDI. You explain these communications contain a draft report on a firefighter fatality investigation by TDI. We understand with respect to these communications, the city, DHHS, and TDI share a privity of interest in investigating this fatality. You state the draft report at issue has been released in its final form to the public. Upon review, we find the city may withhold the information we have marked in Exhibit D under section 552.111 of the Government Code.⁴ However, we find the remaining information at issue in Exhibit D does not consist of advice, opinion, or recommendation, but rather consists of general administrative or purely factual information. Thus, we conclude the city failed to demonstrate how the remaining information at issue in Exhibit D is excepted under section 552.111. Consequently, the city may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue in Exhibit D under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

Section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if . . . release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body claiming section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state Exhibit B relates to an open criminal investigation by the Arson and Fire Investigation Division of the Dallas Fire-Rescue Department. We note, for purposes of section 552.108, the arson investigation division of a fire department is considered a law enforcement agency. *See Open Records Decision No. 127 at 8* (1976). Based on your representation and our review, we conclude the release of the information at issue would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ’g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (court delineates law enforcement interests present in active cases), *writ ref’d n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Accordingly, the city may withhold Exhibit B under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.⁵

In summary, the city must withhold the information we have marked in Exhibit D under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with federal law. The city may withhold the responsive information in Exhibit C under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. The city may withhold the information we have marked in Exhibit D under section 552.111 of the Government Code. The city may withhold Exhibit B under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. The city must release the remaining information.

⁴As our ruling is dispositive for this information, we need not address the remaining arguments against its disclosure.

⁵As our ruling is dispositive for this information, we need not address your remaining argument against its disclosure.

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,



Megan G. Holloway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MGH/eb

Ref: ID# 553321

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Alice A. Kelley
Senior Attorney
Public Health Division
Department of Health & Human Services
Parklawn Building, Room 4A53
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, Maryland 20857
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Stanton Strickland
Associate Commissioner
Texas Department of Insurance
P. O. Box 149104
Austin, Texas 78714-9104
(w/o enclosures)