



February 12, 2015

Ms. June B. Harden
Assistant Attorney General
Public Information Coordinator's Office
General Counsel Division
Office of the Attorney General
Post Office Box 12548
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

OR2015-02734

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. This request was originally received by the Open Records Division of this office and assigned ID# 553825. Preparation of the ruling has been assigned to the Opinion Committee of this office.

The Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") received a request for information related to a previous request for information (TEA PIR No. 22265), which the OAG responded to on January 2, 2014. You state that the OAG will release some of the information responsive to the request, but that the remainder of the responsive information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the representative sample of information you have submitted under Exhibit B.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. *See* TEX. GOV'T CODE ANN. § 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 (2002) at 6-7. 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. See *In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding [mand. denied]) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney is 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 satisfy this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1)(A)-(E). 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.* 503(b)(1), 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 [mand. denied]). 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) (orig. proceeding) (privilege extends to “entire communication, including facts contained therein”).

You state the information submitted under Exhibit B constitutes or documents communications between privileged parties that were made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the OAG. You further state that these communications were not intended to be disclosed and have not been disclosed to non-privileged parties. 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 OAG may withhold the submitted information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. As this ruling is dispositive of the entirety of the information submitted in your request, we need not address your remaining argument against 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,



Virginia K. Hoelscher
Assistant Attorney General
Opinion Committee

VKH/sdk

Ref: ID# 553825

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)