



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 8, 2015

Ms. Shannon C. Francis  
Assistant County Attorney  
Williamson County Attorney's Office  
405 Martin Luther King Street, Box #7  
Georgetown, Texas 78626

OR2015-13803

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# 570646.

The Williamson County Attorney's Office (the "county attorney's office") received a request for a file relating to a specified lawsuit. The county attorney's office claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code and privileged under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. We have considered the county attorney's office arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part, the following:

(a) [T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

(1) a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body, except as provided by Section 552.108[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). The submitted information consists of a completed investigation that is subject to section 552.022(a)(1). The county attorney's office must release the completed investigation pursuant to section 552.022(a)(1), unless it is excepted

from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code or expressly made confidential under the Act or other law. *See id.* Although the county attorney's office raises sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code, these exceptions are discretionary in nature and do not make information confidential under the Act. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 677 at 8-10 (2002) (governmental body may waive attorney work product privilege under section 552.111), 676 at 10-11 (2002) (governmental body may waive attorney-client privilege under section 552.107(1)), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions).* Therefore, the county attorney's office may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.107 or section 552.111. However, the Texas Supreme Court has held 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. *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Thus, we will consider the county attorney's office's assertions of the attorney-client privilege and the attorney work product privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5, respectively.

Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 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 ORD 677 at 9-10.* 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, orig. proceeding).

Furthermore, if a requestor seeks a governmental body's entire litigation file, the governmental body may assert the file is excepted from disclosure in its entirety because such a request implicates the core work product aspect of the privilege. *See* ORD 677 at 5-6. Thus, if the governmental body demonstrates the file was created in anticipation of litigation, this office will presume the entire file is within the scope of the privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 647 at 5 (1996) (organization of attorney's litigation file necessarily reflects attorney's thought processes (citing *Nat'l Union Fire Ins. Co. v. Valdez*, 863 S.W.2d 458, 461 (Tex. 1993))); *see also* *Curry v. Walker*, 873 S.W.2d 379, 380 (Tex. 1994) ("the decision as to what to include in [the file] necessarily reveals the attorney's thought processes concerning the prosecution or defense of the case").

The county attorney's office argues the present request for information encompasses the entire litigation file compiled by an attorney for the county attorney's office in the course of preparing for pending litigation. The county attorney's office further states the information at issue reflects the mental impressions or legal reasoning of the attorney. Upon review, we find the county attorney's office has demonstrated the submitted information constitutes core attorney work product. Therefore, we conclude the county attorney's office may withhold the submitted information under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5.<sup>1</sup>

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](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,



David L. Wheelus  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

DLW/bhf

---

<sup>1</sup>As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the county attorney's office's remaining argument against disclosure.

Ref: ID# 570646

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)