



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 16, 2015

Mr. Paul A. Ready
County Attorney
Legal Department
County of Galveston
722 Moody Street, Fifth Floor
Galveston, Texas 77550

OR2015-14468

Dear Mr. Ready:

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# 572205.

The County of Galveston (the "county") received a request for various categories of information pertaining to property located at a specified address "or its contiguous properties or environs," during a specified time period. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming 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* 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

¹Although you raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with Texas Rule of Evidence 503, 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). Further, 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.

communication must have been made “to facilitate 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)(A), (B), (C), (D), (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. Finally, 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: (A) to whom disclosure is made to further the rendition of professional legal services to the client; or (B) reasonably necessary to transmit 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 submitted information consists of communications made between or among an elected county official, nuisance abatement personnel for the county, and county attorneys. You state all the communications were made in the furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the county with the intent that they be confidential, and the confidentiality of the communications has been maintained. Upon review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the submitted information. Therefore, the county may generally withhold the submitted information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. However, we note one of the otherwise privileged e-mail strings includes attachments received from or sent to non-privileged parties. Furthermore, if these attachments are removed from the e-mail string and stand alone, they are responsive to the request for information. Therefore, if the county maintains these non-privileged attachments, which we have marked, separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which they appear, then the county may not withhold these non-privileged attachments under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code and must release them to the requestor.

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,



Joseph Keeney
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JDK/eb

Ref: ID# 572205

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)