



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 23, 2016

Ms. Katheryne Ellison
Assistant General Counsel
Houston Independent School District
4400 West 18th Street
Houston, Texas 77092-8501

OR2016-11677

Dear Ms. Ellison:

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# 615000.

The Houston Independent School District (the "district") received a request for information pertaining to the requestor's child. The district claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exception and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.

Initially, we note the district submitted certain e-mail communications, but no other information responsive to the request. Thus, we find the submitted information is not representative of the other types of information to which the requestor seeks access. Please be advised, this open records letter ruling applies only to the type of information you have submitted for our review. This ruling does not authorize the district to withhold any information that is substantially different from the type of information you submitted to this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302. Accordingly, to the extent any information responsive to the remainder of the request for information existed in the possession of the district when it received the request, we assume the district has released that information to the requestor. *See* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible). If the district has not released any such information, it must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. 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 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate that the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made “to facilitate 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. *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 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 demonstrate 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), (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. 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: (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. *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 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) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

The district asserts the information it has marked under section 552.107(1) consists of confidential communications between attorneys for and employees of the district that were made for the purpose of rendering professional legal advice. It also asserts the communications were intended to be confidential and their confidentiality has been maintained. Upon review, we find the district has demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to this information. Therefore, the district may withhold the information it has marked under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. The district must release the remaining information.

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,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/eb

Ref: ID# 615000

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)