



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 18, 2016

Ms. Annabel Canchola
Counsel for Honey Grove Independent School District
Powell & Leon, L.L.P.
115 Wild Basin Road, Suite 106
Austin, Texas 78746

OR2016-16167

Dear Ms. Canchola:

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# 621049.

The Honey Grove Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for all attorney billing records submitted to the district during a specified time frame. You state the district has released some responsive information. You claim some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code and privileged under rule 503 of the Texas Rule of Evidence.¹ We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

You acknowledge the submitted information consists of attorney fee bills that are subject to section 552.022(a)(16) of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a)(16) provides for required public disclosure of "information that is in a bill for attorney's fees and that is not privileged under the attorney-client privilege," unless the information is confidential under the Act or other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(16). Although you raise section 552.107 of

¹Although you raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5, 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). Additionally, although you reference rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, you make no arguments to support that privilege as required by section 552.301. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(e)(1)(A), .302. Accordingly, this ruling does not address rule 192.5.

the Government Code for the attorney fee bills, this exception is discretionary in nature and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 10-11 (attorney-client privilege under section 552.107(1) may be waived), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, the district may not withhold the information subject to section 552.022(a)(16) under section 552.107 of the Government Code. However, the Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Evidence are “other law” within the meaning of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Thus, we will consider your assertion of the attorney-client privilege under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.

Texas Rule of Evidence 503(b)(1) provides the following:

A client has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent any other person from disclosing confidential communications made to facilitate the rendition of professional legal services to the client:

(A) between the client or the client’s representative and the client’s lawyer or the lawyer’s representative;

(B) between the client’s lawyer and the lawyer’s representative;

(C) by the client, the client’s representative, the client’s lawyer, or the lawyer’s representative to a lawyer representing another party in a pending action or that lawyer’s representative, if the communications concern a matter of common interest in the pending action;

(D) between the client’s representatives or between the client and the client’s representative; or

(E) among lawyers and their representatives representing the same client.

Tex. R. Evid. 503(b)(1). A communication is “confidential” if not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made to further the rendition of professional legal services to the client or reasonably necessary to transmit the communication. *Id.* 503(a)(5).

Accordingly, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under Rule 503, a governmental body must 1) show that the document is a communication transmitted between privileged parties or reveals a confidential communication; 2) identify the parties involved in the communication; and 3) show that the communication is confidential by explaining that it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and that it was made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client. *See*

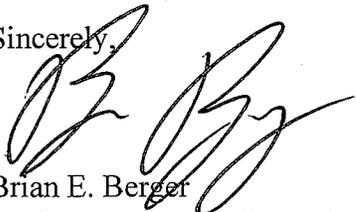
Open Records Decision No. 676 (2002). Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the entire communication is confidential under Rule 503 provided the client has not waived the privilege or the communication does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in Rule 503(d). *Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein); *In re Valero Energy Corp.*, 973 S.W.2d 453, 457 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1998, orig. proceeding) (privilege attaches to complete communication, including factual information).

You assert portions of the submitted fee bills should be withheld under rule 503. You state the attorney fee bills contain communications between privileged parties that were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services. You do not indicate the district has waived the attorney-client privilege with regard to the communications. Upon review, we find the district may withhold the information we have marked under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. However, some of the communications are with individuals you have not demonstrated are privileged parties. Further, some of the information at issue does not document a communication. We note an entry stating a memorandum or an e-mail was prepared or drafted does not demonstrate the document was communicated to the client. Thus, we find you have not demonstrated the remaining information constitutes privileged attorney-client communications for the purposes of Texas Rule of Evidence 503. Thus, the district may not withhold the remaining information at issue on that basis. As you raise no further exceptions to disclosure, the remaining information must be released.

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,



Brian E. Berger
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BB/eb

Ref: ID# 621049

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)