



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 31, 2016

Ms. Debbie F. Harrison
Assistant District Attorney
Civil Division
County of Collin
2100 Bloomdale Road, Suite 100
McKinney, Texas 75071

OR2016-19700

Dear Ms. Harrison:

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# 625091.

The Collin County Criminal District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney's office") received a request for all information pertaining to a specified traffic accident. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.108, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the submitted information includes a court-filed document, which we have marked. Section 552.022(a)(17) of the Government Code provides for required public disclosure of "information that is also contained in a public court record[.]" unless the information is expressly made confidential under the Act or other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(17). The district attorney's office seeks to withhold the information at issue under sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code and the attorney work product privilege of section 552.111 of the Government Code. However, these exceptions are discretionary exceptions to disclosure that protect a governmental body's interests and do not make information confidential under the Act. *See id.* § 552.007; *Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469, 475-76 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive Gov't Code § 552.103); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 677 (2002) (governmental body may waive attorney work product privilege under section 552.111), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999)

(waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.108 subject to waiver). Therefore, the district attorney's office may not withhold the information subject to section 552.022 under section 552.103, section 552.108, or section 552.111 of the Government Code. The attorney work product privilege is also found in rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. *See* TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5. The Texas Supreme Court has held "[t]he Texas Rules of Civil Procedure are 'other law' within the meaning of section 552.022." *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). However, the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure apply only to "actions of a civil nature." *See* TEX. R. CIV. P. 2. Thus, because the requested documents relate to a criminal case, the attorney work product privilege found in rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure does not apply, and the district attorney's office may not withhold the information at issue on that basis. However, we will consider the district attorney's office's arguments against disclosure of the remaining information.

Next, we note a portion of the submitted information is subject to chapter 550 of the Transportation Code. Section 550.065 applies only to a written report of an accident required under section 550.061, 550.062, or 601.004. *See* Transp. Code § 550.065(a)(1). Chapter 550 requires the creation of a written report when the accident resulted in injury to or the death of a person or damage to the property of any person to the apparent extent of \$1,000 or more. Transp. Code §§ 550.061 (operator's accident report), .062 (officer's accident report). An accident report is privileged and for the confidential use of the Texas Department of Transportation or a local governmental agency of Texas that has use for the information for accident prevention purposes. *Id.* § 550.065(b). However, a governmental entity may release an accident report in accordance with subsections (c) and (c-1). *Id.* § 550.065(c), (c-1). Section 550.065(c) provides a governmental entity shall release an accident report to a person or entity listed under this subsection. *Id.* § 550.065(c).

In this instance, the requestor is a person listed under section 550.065(c). Although the district attorney's office asserts sections 552.103, 552.108, and 552.111 to withhold the information, a statutory right of access prevails over the Act's general exceptions to public disclosure. *See, e.g.,* Open Records Decision Nos. 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exception to disclosure under the Act). Because sections 552.103, 552.108, and 552.111 are general exceptions under the Act, the requestor's statutory access under section 550.065(c) prevails and the district attorney's office may not withhold the information under section 552.103, section 552.108, or section 552.111 of the Government Code. Thus, the district attorney's office must release the accident report to this requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c) of the Transportation Code.

The district attorney's office asserts the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code, which excepts from disclosure "[a]n interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency[.]" Gov't Code § 552.111. This section encompasses the attorney work product privilege found in Rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News, 22 S.W.3d 351, 360 (Tex. 2000); ORD 677 at 4-8. Rule 192.5 defines work product as

(1) material prepared or mental impressions developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial by or for a party or a party's representatives, including the party's attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees, or agents; or

(2) a communication made in anticipation of litigation or for trial between a party and the party's representatives or among a party's representatives, including the party's attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees or agents.

Tex. R. Civ. P. 192.5(a). A governmental body seeking to withhold information under this exception bears the burden of demonstrating the information was created or developed for trial or in anticipation of litigation by or for a party or a party's representative. Tex. R. Civ. P. 192.5; ORD 677 at 6-8. In order for this office to conclude the information was made or developed in anticipation of litigation, we must be satisfied that

a) a reasonable person would have concluded from the totality of the circumstances surrounding the investigation that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue; and b) the party resisting discovery believed in good faith that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue and [created or obtained the information] for the purpose of preparing for such litigation.

Nat'l Tank Co. 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; ORD 677 at 7.

The work product doctrine under section 552.111 of the Government Code is applicable to litigation files in criminal and civil litigation. *Curry v. Walker*, 873 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. 1994); see *U.S. v. Nobles*, 422 U.S. 225, 236 (1975). In *Curry*, the Texas Supreme Court held that a request for a district attorney's "entire file" was "too broad" and, citing *National Union Fire Insurance Co. v. Valdez*, 863 S.W.2d 458, 460 (Tex. 1993), held that "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." *Id.* at 380. Accordingly, if a requestor seeks an attorney's entire litigation file, and a governmental body demonstrates that the file was created in anticipation of litigation, we will presume that the entire file is excepted from disclosure under the attorney work product aspect of section 552.111. Open Records Decision No. 647 at 5 (1996); see *Nat'l Union*, 863 S.W.2d at 461 (organization of attorney's litigation file necessarily reflects attorney's thought processes).

The district attorney's office asserts the remaining information encompasses the district attorney's entire litigation file concerning a case that was pending when it received the

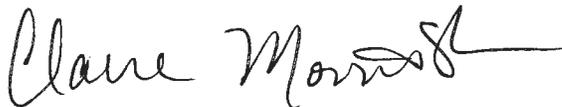
request. We find the request at issue constitutes a request for an “entire” litigation file for purposes of the *Curry* decision. Thus, we agree the district attorney’s office may withhold the remaining information under section 552.111 of the Government Code.¹

In summary, the district attorney’s office must release the marked court-filed document pursuant to section 552.022(a)(17) of the Government Code and must release the accident report to this requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c) of the Transportation Code. The district attorney’s office may withhold the remaining information under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/som

Ref: ID# 625091

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address your other arguments against disclosure of this information.