



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 7, 2015

Ms. Lauren Downey
Assistant Attorney General
Public Information Coordinator
General Counsel Division
Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

OR2015-13635

Dear Ms. Downey:

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# 570385 (OAG PIR Nos. 15-41304 and 15-41424).

The Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") received two requests from the same requestor for correspondence between the OAG and the West Virginia Attorney General's Office during specified time periods. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

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

¹This letter ruling assumes the submitted representative sample of information is truly representative of the requested information as a whole. This ruling does not reach, and therefore does not authorize, the withholding of any other requested information to the extent the other information is substantially different than that submitted to this office. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(e)(1)(D), .302; Open Records Decision Nos. 499 at 6 (1988), 497 at 4 (1988).

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. *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 state the submitted information includes communications between OAG attorneys and other privileged parties. You state these communications were made for the purpose of providing legal services to the State. You further state these communications were not intended to be disclosed and have not been disclosed to non-privileged parties. Based on these representations and our review, we find the OAG has demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the submitted information. Accordingly, the OAG may withhold the submitted information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.²

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.

²As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristi L. Godden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kristi" being the most prominent.

Kristi L. Godden
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KLK/cz

Ref: ID# 570385

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)