



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

This ruling has been modified by court action.
The ruling and judgment can be viewed in PDF
format below.



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 30, 2016

The ruling you have requested has been amended as a result of litigation and has been attached to this document.

Mr. Brad Bowman
General Counsel
Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation
P.O. Box 12157
Austin, Texas 78711

OR2016-07085

Dear Mr. Bowman:

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# 603545 (TLDR PIR No. 20160287).

The Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to investigations performed by named individuals during a specified time period, copies of complaints filed against specified licensees during specified time periods, and copies of e-mails or text messages to or from named individuals during a specified time period.¹ You state some information has been or will be released to the requestor. You state you will redact information pursuant to sections 552.130(c) and 552.147(b) of the Government Code.² You claim the submitted information is excepted

¹We note the department sought and received clarification of the information requested. *See* Gov't Code § 552.222 (providing if request for information is unclear, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify request); *see also* *City of Dallas v. Abbott*, 304 S.W.3d 380, 387 (Tex. 2010) (holding when governmental entity, acting in good faith, requests clarification of unclear or overbroad request for public information, ten-business-day period to request attorney general opinion is measured from date request is clarified or narrowed).

²Section 552.130(c) of the Government Code allows a governmental body to redact the information described in section 552.130(a) without the necessity of seeking a decision from the attorney general. *See* Gov't Code § 552.130(c). If a governmental body redacts such information, it must notify the requestor in accordance with section 552.130(e). *See id.* § 552.130(d), (e). Section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office. *See id.* § 552.147(b).

from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code.³ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.⁴

Initially, we note the submitted information includes court-filed documents. 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 it is “made confidential under [the Act] or other law[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.022(a)(17). Although you seek to withhold this information under section 552.103 of the Government Code, this section is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body’s interests and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See 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 section 552.103); Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Accordingly, the department may not withhold the court-filed documents, which we have marked, under section 552.103. As you raise no further exceptions to disclosure for this information, the department must release the marked court-filed documents. We will address your claims under sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 for the information not subject to section 552.022(a)(17).

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides as follows:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person’s office or employment, is or may be a party.

...

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

³Although you also raise section 552.101 for the submitted information, you provide no arguments explaining how this exception is applicable to the information at issue. Therefore, we assume you no longer assert this exception. *See* Gov’t Code §§ 552.301, .302.

⁴We assume the “representative sample” of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

Gov't Code § 552.103(a), (c). A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing (1) litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, orig. proceeding); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). A governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

You state the remaining information in Exhibit 7 relates to open enforcement cases. You assert this information “is excepted from release by the [l]itigation exception because it is related to the ongoing litigation.” However, upon review, we find you have failed to identify any specific pending litigation to which the information at issue is related. Thus, the department has failed to demonstrate the information is related to litigation that was pending on the date the department received the request for information. Consequently, the department may not withhold any portion of the remaining information in Exhibit 7 under section 552.103(a) of the Government Code.

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).

You claim the information in Exhibit 6 is protected by section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. You state the information at issue consists of communications between department attorneys and department staff. You state the information at issue was communicated for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the department. You further state these communications were intended to be confidential and have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to most of the information at issue. However, we find you have failed to demonstrate the information we have marked for release consists of privileged attorney-client communications made for the rendition of professional legal services. Therefore, the department may not withhold the information we have marked for release under section 552.107(1). Accordingly, with the exception of the information we have marked for release, the department may generally withhold the remaining information in Exhibit 6 under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. We note, however, some of these e-mail strings include e-mails received from and sent to parties with whom you have not demonstrated the department shares a privileged relationship. Furthermore, if the e-mails received from and sent to non-privileged parties are removed from the e-mail strings and stand alone, they are responsive to the request for information. Therefore, if the non-privileged e-mails, which we have marked, are maintained by the department separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail strings in which they appear, then the department may not withhold these non-privileged e-mails under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.

Section 552.111 of the Government Code 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. Section 552.111 encompasses the attorney work product privilege found in rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. Open Records Decision No. 677 at 4-8 (2002); *see City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351, 377 (Tex. 2000). 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)(1)-(2). 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. *Id.*; ORD 677 at 6-8. In order for this office to conclude that 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 . . . 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.

You contend the information in Exhibit 8 consists of attorney work product. However, upon review, we find you have not demonstrated the information at issue consists of material prepared, mental impressions developed, or a communication made for trial or in anticipation of litigation by or for a party or a party's representative because you submitted no arguments to support this assertion. Accordingly, the department may not withhold the information in Exhibit 8 as attorney work product under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

Section 552.111 of the Government Code also encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of section 552.111 is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990).

In Open Records Decision No. 615, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined section 552.111 exempts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* ORD 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995).

Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *Arlington Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 37 S.W.3d 152 (Tex. App.—Austin 2001, no pet.); *see* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

This office has also concluded a preliminary draft of a document intended for public release in its final form necessarily represents the drafter's advice, opinion, and recommendation with regard to the form and content of the final document, so as to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 559 at 2 (1990) (applying statutory predecessor). Section 552.111 protects factual information in the draft that also will be included in the final version of the document. *See id.* at 2-3. Thus, section 552.111 encompasses the entire contents, including comments, underlining, deletions, and proofreading marks, of a preliminary draft of a policymaking document that will be released to the public in its final form. *See id.* at 2.

You assert the information in Exhibit 8 consists of advice, recommendations, and opinions of department employees regarding policymaking decisions. You also indicate the information at issue includes draft documents that reflect the deliberations of department employees. Upon review, we find the information at issue is general administrative and purely factual information or does not pertain to policymaking. Thus, we find you have failed to establish any portion of the information at issue constitutes advice, opinions, recommendations, or other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the department. Accordingly, the department may not withhold the information in Exhibit 8 under the deliberative process privilege of section 552.111 of the Government Code.

Some of the remaining information may be subject to section 552.117 of the Government Code.⁵ Section 552.117(a)(1) excepts from disclosure the home address and telephone number, emergency contact information, social security number, and family member information of a current or former employee or official of a governmental body who requests this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(1). Section 552.117 is applicable to cellular telephone numbers, provided the cellular telephone service is not paid for by a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision No. 506 at 5-6 (1988) (statutory predecessor to section 552.117 not applicable to cellular telephone numbers provided and paid for by governmental body and intended for official use). Whether a particular item of information is protected by section 552.117(a)(1) must be determined at the time of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). Thus,

⁵The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

information may be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) only on behalf of a current or former employee or official who made a request for confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. Information may not be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) on behalf of a current or former employee or official who did not timely request under section 552.024 the information be kept confidential. Accordingly, if the individual whose information is at issue timely requested confidentiality pursuant to section 552.024, the department must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.117(a)(1); however, the cellular telephone number may only be withheld if a governmental body does not pay for the cellular telephone service.

You indicate you will redact the e-mail addresses you marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code pursuant to Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009).⁶ Section 552.137 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body" unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c). *See* Gov't Code § 552.137(a)-(c). Section 552.137 does not apply to an institutional e-mail address, the general e-mail address of a business, an e-mail address of a person who has a contractual relationship with a governmental body, an e-mail address of a vendor who seeks to contract with a governmental body, an e-mail address maintained by a governmental entity for one of its officials or employees, or an e-mail address provided to a governmental body on a letterhead. *See id.* § 552.137(c). We note the remaining information contains additional e-mail addresses, which we have marked, subject to section 552.137. Accordingly, we find the department must withhold the personal e-mail addresses you marked, and the additional e-mail addresses we have marked, under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owners affirmatively consent to their public disclosure.

We note some of the remaining information may be protected by copyright. A custodian of public records must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are copyrighted. Open Records Decision No. 180 at 3 (1977). A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.*; *see* Open Records Decision No. 109 (1975). If a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit.

In summary, the department must release the information we have marked pursuant to section 552.022(a)(17) of the Government Code. With the exception of the information we have marked for release, the department may generally withhold the remaining information

⁶Open Records Decision No. 684 serves as a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold certain categories of information, including personal e-mail addresses under section 552.137 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision. *See* ORD 684.

in Exhibit 6 under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. If the non-privileged information, which we have marked, is maintained by the department separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail strings in which it appears, then the department may not withhold this information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. If the individual whose information is at issue timely requested confidentiality pursuant to section 552.024, the department must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.117(a)(1); however, the cellular telephone number may only be withheld if a governmental body does not pay for the cellular telephone service. The department must withhold the personal e-mail addresses you marked, and the additional e-mail addresses we have marked, under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owners affirmatively consent to their public disclosure. The department must release the remaining information; however, any information protected by copyright may only be released in accordance with copyright law.

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,



Kenny Moreland
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KJM/som

Ref: ID# 603545

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

NOV 29 2017

At 8:41 A M.
Velva L. Price, District Clerk

Cause No. D-1-GN-16-001854

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF
LICENSING AND REGULATION,
Plaintiff,

v.

KEN PAXTON, ATTORNEY
GENERAL OF TEXAS,
Defendant.

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IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF

TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS

201st JUDICIAL DISTRICT

AGREED ORDER OF DISMISSAL

This cause is an action under the Public Information Act (PIA), Texas Government Code chapter 552. Plaintiff Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) and Defendant Ken Paxton, Attorney General of Texas (Attorney General), agree that this matter should be dismissed pursuant to PIA section 552.327 on the grounds that the requestor has voluntarily withdrawn the request for information in writing. *See* Tex. Gov't Code § 552.327. A court may dismiss a PIA suit under section 552.327 when all parties agree to dismissal and the Attorney General determines and represents to the Court that the requestor has voluntarily withdrawn the request for information in writing or has abandoned the request. *Id.* The Attorney General represents to the Court that the requestor, Stan's Wrecker Service, has voluntarily withdrawn the request for information in writing.

Further, Letter Ruling OR2016-07085 will not be considered a "previous determination" by the Office of the Attorney General under Tex. Gov't Code § 552.301(a), (f); and, if the precise information is requested again, TDLR may ask for a decision from the Attorney General under Tex. Gov't Code § 552.301(g).



Accordingly, TDLR is not required to disclose the requested information subject to release in Letter Ruling OR2016-07085. The parties request that the Court enter this Agreed Order of Dismissal.

The Court is of the opinion that entry of an agreed dismissal order is appropriate.

It is THEREFORE, ORDERED, ADJUDGED and DECREED that this cause is DISMISSED in all respects;

All court costs and attorney fees are taxed to the party incurring same;

All other requested relief not expressly granted herein is denied;

This order disposes of all claims between the parties and is final.

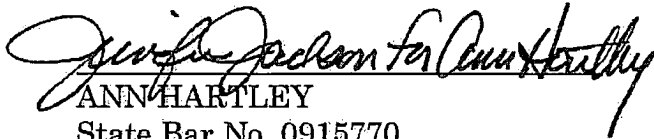
Signed this 29th day of November, 2017.



JUDGE PRESIDING

TIM SUGAR

AGREED:



ANN HARTLEY

State Bar No. 0915770

Assistant Attorney General

Financial Litigation, Tax, and

Charitable Trusts Division

P.O. Box 12548

Austin, Texas 78711-2548

Telephone: (512) 936-1313

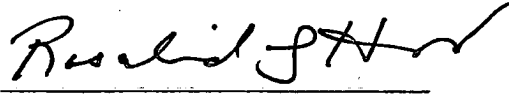
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