



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 2, 2016

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

OR2016-17269

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# 620900.

The Dodd City Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for attorney billing records for a specified time period. You state you have released some information to the requestor. 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 Rules of Evidence.¹ We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

We note, and 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 expressly confidential under the Act or other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(16). Although the district raises section 552.107 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 6 (section 552.107 is not other law for purposes of section 552.022), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000)

¹Although you raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 552.107 of the Government Code and Texas Rule of Evidence 503, this office has concluded section 552.101 does not encompass other exceptions found in the Act or discovery privileges. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 1-2 (2002), 575 at 2 (1990).

(discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, the district may not withhold the information at issue under section 552.107. However, we note 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). Accordingly, we will address your claims of the attorney-client privilege under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.

Texas Rule of Evidence 503 enacts the attorney-client privilege. Rule 503(b)(1) provides:

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* ORD 676. 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*

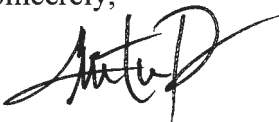
Corp., 973 S.W.2d 453, 457 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1998, orig. proceeding) (privilege attaches to complete communication, including factual information).

You state the submitted fee bills contain communications between the district's attorneys and district employees in their capacity as clients that were intended to facilitate the rendition of legal services to the district. You further state these communications were intended to be, and have remained, confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude the district may withhold the information we marked under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. However, we find the remaining information at issue does not indicate it was communicated. 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. Therefore, we find you have failed to demonstrate the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the remaining information at issue. Accordingly, the district may not withhold the remaining information at issue under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. As you raise no other exceptions, 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,



Cristian Rosas-Grillet
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CRG/bw

Ref: ID# 620900

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)