



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 24, 2017

Mr. Francisco J. Prado, Jr.  
Counsel to the Valley View Independent School District  
Francisco J. Prado, Jr. Attorney at Law  
P.O. Box 3489  
Edinburg, Texas 78539

OR2017-16423

Dear Mr. Prado:

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# 667683.

The Valley View Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for specified attorney fee bills. You claim some of the submitted information is privileged under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence and rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. We have also received and considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit written comments regarding why information should or should not be released). We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

The district states the submitted information consists of attorney fee bills that fall within the scope of section 552.022 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. *See* Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(16). We note the Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Evidence and the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure are "other law" within the meaning of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Therefore, we will address your claim of the attorney-client privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503 and the work product privilege under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.5 for the submitted attorney fee bills.

Texas Rule of Evidence 503(b)(1) provides as follows:

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 it is not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication. *Id.* 503(a)(5).

Thus, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under rule 503, a governmental body must (1) show 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 the communication is confidential by explaining it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and it was made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client. Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the information is privileged and confidential under rule 503, provided the client has not waived the privilege or the document does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 503(d). *See Pittsburgh Corning Corp. v. Caldwell*, 861 S.W.2d 423, 427 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, orig. proceeding).

You claim the portions of the fee bills you have marked should be withheld under rule 503. You assert the fee bills at issue include privileged attorney-client communications between counsel for the district and district employees in their capacity as clients. You state the communications at issue were made for the purpose of the rendition of legal services to the

district. You state the communications at issue have not been, and were not intended to be, disclosed to third parties. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we find the district has established most of the information it marked constitutes attorney-client communications under rule 503. Thus, with the exception of the information we have marked for release, the district may withhold the information it marked pursuant to rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. However, we find you have failed to establish any of the remaining information consists of privileged attorney-client communications. Therefore, the district may not withhold any of the remaining information under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.

Rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure encompasses the attorney work product privilege. For purposes of section 552.022 of the Government Code, information is confidential under rule 192.5 only to the extent the information implicates the core work product aspect of the work product privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 677 at 9-10 (2002). Rule 192.5 defines core work product as the work product of an attorney or an attorney's representative, developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial, that contains the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of the attorney or the attorney's representative. *See* TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5(a), (b)(1). Accordingly, in order to withhold attorney core work product from disclosure under rule 192.5, a governmental body must demonstrate the material was (1) created for trial or in anticipation of litigation and (2) consists of the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or an attorney's representative. *Id.*

The first prong of the work product test, which requires a governmental body to show the information at issue was created in anticipation of litigation, has two parts. A governmental body must demonstrate (1) a reasonable person would have concluded from the totality of the circumstances surrounding the investigation there was a substantial chance litigation would ensue, and (2) the party resisting discovery believed in good faith there was a substantial chance litigation would ensue and conducted the investigation for the purpose of preparing for such litigation. *See Nat'l Tank 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. The second part of the work product test requires the governmental body to show the materials at issue contain the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or an attorney's representative. *See* TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5(b)(1). A document containing core work product information that meets both parts of the work product test is confidential under rule 192.5, provided the information does not fall within the scope of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 192.5(c). *See Pittsburgh*, 861 S.W.2d at 427.

You claim the remaining information you have marked consists of attorney core work product that is protected by rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. You state this information reflects attorneys' mental impressions, conclusions, or legal theories. Having considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the information at issue, we find you have

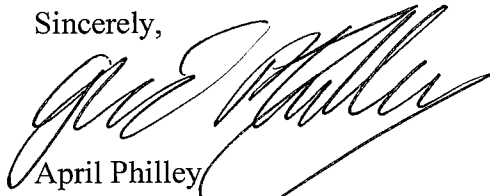
not demonstrated the information at issue contains the mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, or legal theories of an attorney or the attorney's representative that was developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial. We therefore conclude the district may not withhold any of the remaining information under rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

In summary, with the exception of the information we have marked for release, the district may withhold the information it marked pursuant to rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. 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](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,



April Philley  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

AP/sb

Ref: ID# 667683

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)