



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 21, 2017

Mr. Neal Falgoust
Assistant City Attorney
City of Austin
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767

OR2017-19034

Dear Mr. Falgoust:

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# 678566 (PIR# 35642).

The City of Austin (the "city") received a request for e-mails between specified city departments, Ford Motor Company, or Ford car dealerships involving four specified terms during a specified time period.¹ You state the city will release some of the requested information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.²

¹We note the city received clarification regarding this request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.222(b) (governmental body may communicate with requestor for purpose of clarifying or narrowing request for information); *City of Dallas v. Abbott*, 304 S.W.3d 380, 387 (Tex. 2010) (holding that when a governmental entity, acting in good faith, requests clarification or narrowing of an unclear or over-broad request for public information, the ten-day period to request an attorney general ruling is measured from the date the request is clarified or narrowed).

²We 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 that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information subject to 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 state the submitted information constitutes communications between city attorneys and city employees that were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the city. You also state the communications were intended to be confidential and have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.107(1) 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,



Jennifer Copeland
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JC/bw

Ref: ID# 678566

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)