



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 28, 2019

Ms. Kristen O. Fancher  
Counsel for the Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District  
Fancher Legal, PLLC  
6136 Frisco Square Boulevard, Suite 400  
Frisco, Texas 75034

OR2019-08533

Dear Ms. Fancher:

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# 756114.

The Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for twenty-one categories of information pertaining to communications between the district, a named individual, or specified law firms pertaining to particular subjects. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the district has not submitted information responsive to all of the categories of information to which the requestor seeks access. Although the district states it has submitted a representative sample of the requested information, we find the submitted information is not representative of all the types of information at issue. Please be advised, this open records letter ruling applies only to the types of information you have submitted for our review. This ruling does not authorize the district to withhold any information that

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<sup>1</sup>Although the district also raises Texas Rule of Evidence 503, we note the proper exception to raise when asserting the attorney-client privilege for information not subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code is section 552.107 of the Government Code. *See* Open Record Decision Nos. 677 (2002), 676 at 1-2 (2002).

is substantially different from the types of information the district submitted to this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302 (where request for attorney general decision does not comply with requirements of Gov't Code § 552.301, information at issue is presumed to be public). Accordingly, to the extent any such information existed on the date the district received the request, we assume the district has released it. If the district has not released any such information, it must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible).

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. *See* ORD 676 at 6-7. First, a governmental body must demonstrate 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 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). 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. *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 consists of communications between attorneys for the district and district employees and officials that were made for the purpose of providing legal services to the district. You state the communications were intended to be confidential and

have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find the submitted information consists of privileged attorney-client communications. Therefore, the district 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](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 "Erin Groff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Erin Groff  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

EMG/gw

Ref: ID# 756114

c: Requestor