



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 2, 2019

Ms. Laura Garza Jimenez
Nueces County Attorney
Nueces County
901 Leopard Street, Room 2007
Corpus Christi, Texas 78401

OR2019-27548

Dear Ms. Jimenez:

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# 788788.

Nueces County Hospital District (the "district") received a request for attorney billing statements and written proof of payment for a specified lawsuit. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We note the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part:

(a) [T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

...

(3) information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the receipt or expenditure of public or other funds by a governmental body; [and]

...

(16) information that is in a bill for attorney's fees and that is not privileged under the attorney client privilege[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(3), (16). The submitted information consists of information in an account, contract, or voucher relating to the receipt or expenditure of funds by the county that is subject to section 552.022(a)(3) and attorney fee bills that are subject to section 552.022(a)(16). This information must be released unless it is made confidential under the Act or other law. *See id.* § 552.022(a)(3), (16). You seek to withhold the information at issue under sections 552.103 and 552.107 of the Government Code. However, sections 552.103 and 552.107 are discretionary in nature and do 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 Gov't Code § 552.103); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 10-11 (2002) (attorney-client privilege under Gov't Code § 552.107(1) may be waived), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, the information subject to section 552.022 may not be withheld under section 552.103 or section 552.107 of the Government Code. However, 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). We will therefore consider your assertion of the attorney-client privilege under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence for the information at issue.

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 assert the information at issue includes privileged attorney-client communications between privileged parties. You state the communications were made for the purpose of the rendition of legal services to the district. You indicate these communications 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 county has established the information we have marked constitutes attorney-client communications under rule 503. Thus, the district may withhold the information we have marked pursuant to rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.

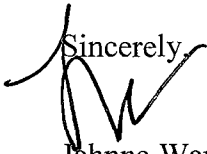
However, upon review, we find some of the remaining information has been shared with individuals you have not demonstrated are privileged parties. Further, we note an entry stating a memorandum or an email was prepared or drafted does not demonstrate the document was communicated to the client. Thus, we find you have failed to demonstrate any the remaining information at issue consists of privileged attorney client communications. Accordingly, no portion of the remaining information may be withheld under rule 503. Therefore, the county 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 <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG’s Open

Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jahna Ward', written over the word 'Sincerely,'.

Jahna Ward
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JW/jxd

Ref: ID# 788788

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)