



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 10, 2020

Mr. Steven Weller  
Counsel for the Roma Independent School District  
Bickerstaff, Heath, Delgado & Acosta, L.L.P.  
3711 South MoPac Expressway, Building One, Suite 300  
Austin, Texas 78746

OR2020-00951

Dear Mr. Mendez:

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# 805480.

The Roma Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified arrest. The district claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office has informed this office the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), section 1232g of title 20 of the United States Code, does not permit state and local educational authorities to disclose to this office, without parental or an adult student's consent, unredacted, personally identifiable information contained in education records for the purpose of our review in the open records ruling process under the Act.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, state and local educational authorities that receive a request for education records from a member of the public under the Act must not submit education records to this office in unredacted form, that is, in a form in which "personally identifiable information" is disclosed. *See* 34 C.F.R. § 99.3 (defining "personally identifiable information"); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 224 (1979) (student's handwritten comments protected under FERPA because they would make identity of student easily traceable through handwriting,

---

<sup>1</sup>A copy of this letter may be found on the Office of the Attorney General's website at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/files/divisions/open-government/20060725-USDOE-FERPA.pdf>.

style of expression, or particular incidents related in the comments). The district asserts FERPA applies to the requested documents. Because our office is prohibited from reviewing these records to determine whether appropriate redactions under FERPA have been made, we do not address the applicability of FERPA to the requested records, except to note FERPA is not applicable to law enforcement records maintained by the district's police department (the "department") that were created by the department for a law enforcement purpose. *See* 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(a)(4)(B)(ii); 34 C.F.R. §§ 99.3, 99.8. The district represents Exhibit B was created for and is maintained by the department for a law enforcement purpose. Accordingly, Exhibit B is not subject to FERPA and it may not be withheld on that basis.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code exempts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision."<sup>2</sup> Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses section 261.201(a) of the Family Code, which provides as follows:

[T]he following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under [the Act], and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

- (1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and
- (2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). Upon review, we find Exhibit B may have been used or developed by the city's police department (the "department") in an investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse under chapter 261 of the Family Code. *See id.* §§ 101.003(a) (defining "child" for purposes of section 261.201), 261.001(1) (defining "abuse" for purposes of section 261.201). However, we are unable to determine the age of the victim at issue in Exhibit B. Accordingly, we must rule conditionally. The district does not indicate the department has adopted a rule that governs the release of this type of information. Therefore, we assume no such rule exists. Consequently, if the victim at issue in Exhibit B was under eighteen years of age at the time of the offense, then the city must withhold Exhibit B in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a) of the Family Code. However, if the victim was eighteen years of age or older at the time of the offense, then the city may not withhold Exhibit B on that basis.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 at 2 (1987), 480 at 5 (1987).

Section 552.108(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if: (1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(1) must explain how and why the release of the information at issue would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706, 710 (Tex. 1977). The district states Exhibit B relates to a pending criminal investigation or prosecution. Based on this representation, we conclude the release of this information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ’g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177, 186-87 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (delineating law enforcement interests present in active cases), *writ ref’d n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976).

Section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov’t Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). Thus, if the victim was eighteen years of age or older at the time of the offense, then the district must release the basic information in Exhibit B, including any basic information it redacted, but may withhold the remaining information in this exhibit under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

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. 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). 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).


The district explains the remaining information consists of confidential communications between attorneys for and employees of the district that were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services. The district also asserts the communications were intended to be confidential and their confidentiality has been maintained. Upon review, we find the district has demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the information at issue. Therefore, the district may withhold the remaining information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.

In summary, if the victim at issue in Exhibit B was under eighteen years of age at the time of the offense, then the city must withhold Exhibit B in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201(a) of the Family Code. If the victim was eighteen years of age or older at the time of the offense, then the district must release the basic information in Exhibit B, including any basic information it redacted, but may withhold the remaining information in this exhibit under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. The district may withhold the remaining 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 <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,

  
James L. Coggeshall  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JLC/rm

Mr. Steven Weller - Page 5

Ref: ID# 805480

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)