



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 2, 2020

Ms. Tiffany Bangs
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2020-16844

Dear Ms. Bangs:

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# 834683 (Ref. No. 20PIA0255).

Harris County (the "county") received a request for twenty-one categories of information. We understand the county has released some of the requested information. 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.

Initially, we note some of the submitted information, which we have marked, is not responsive to the instant request for information because it was created after the date the county received the instant request for information. This ruling does not address the public availability of any information that is not responsive to the request and the county is not required to release such information in response to this request.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. *See* Gov't Code § 552.107(1). 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.*, 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 information at issue consists of communications involving attorneys for the county and county employees in their capacities as clients. You state these communications were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the county. You state these communications were intended to be, and have remained, confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the information at issue. Accordingly, the county may withhold the submitted responsive information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.¹

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

¹ As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure of this information.

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,

Alexandra C. Burks
Attorney
Open Records Division

ACB/jlbm

Ref: ID# 834683

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)