



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 5, 2020

Ms. June B. Harden  
Assistant Attorney General  
Assistant Public Information Coordinator  
Office of the Attorney General  
P.O. Box 12548  
Austin, TX 78711-2548

OR2020-25075

Dear Ms. Harden:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act ("PIA"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. The Open Records Division ("ORD") of this office received a request for documents on July 16, 2020, and assigned the matter ID# 847101. Preparation of the ruling has been assigned to the Opinion Committee of this office.

You attached a copy of the request marked as Exhibit A. The request seeks the complete file of all "open records complaints against the San Leon Municipal Utilities District by any party, whether resolved or still in progress." You state that the Office of the Attorney General ("OAG") will release most of the responsive information but assert that the remaining responsive information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the information you submitted as Exhibit B.

Section 552.107(1) excepts from disclosure "information that the attorney general . . . is prohibited from disclosing because of a duty to the client under the Texas Rules of Evidence or the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct." TEX. GOV'T CODE § 552.107(1). Section 552.107 applies to information protected by 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. Tex. Att'y Gen. ORD-676 (2002) at 6–7. First, a governmental body must demonstrate that "the information constitutes or documents a communication." *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made for the purpose of facilitating "the rendition of professional legal services to the client." 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, such as acting as an administrator, investigator, or manager. *See In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig.

proceeding), *mand. denied*, 12 S.W.3d 807 (Tex. 2000) (stating that the attorney-client “privilege does not apply if the attorney is acting in a capacity other than that of an attorney”). Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). Lastly, attorney-client privilege applies only to a confidential communication, meaning it was “not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those . . . to whom disclosure is made to further the rendition of professional legal services to the client [or those] 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 [mand. denied]). 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) (orig. proceeding) (stating that the privilege extends to an “entire communication, including facts contained therein”).

You state that the documents submitted as Exhibit B consist of communications between attorneys and staff of the ORD regarding the handling of the requestor’s open records complaint files. You also state that the communications provided as Exhibit B “were not intended to be disclosed and have not been disclosed to non-privileged parties.” Based on your representations and our review, we conclude that the documents you provided as Exhibit B constitute or reveal confidential communications between privileged parties that were made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the OAG. Therefore, we further conclude that the documents submitted as Exhibit B are subject to the attorney-client privilege and may be withheld under section 552.107 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,

William A. Hill  
Assistant Attorney General  
Opinion Committee

WAH/eb

Ref: ID# 847101

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)