



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 23, 2020

Ms. Stephanie M. Brosig  
Mr. Mario Perez  
Counsel for Crystal City Independent School District  
J. Cruz & Associates, LLC  
216 West Village Boulevard, Suite 202  
Laredo, Texas 78041

OR2020-26715

Dear Ms. Brosig and Mr. Perez:

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# 850285.

The Crystal City Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received three requests from the same requestor for information pertaining to three named employees, a specified investigation, specified attorney fee agreements, and specified policies. You state the district has released some of the requested information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.107, 552.135, and 552.137 of the Government Code and privileged pursuant to Texas Rule of Evidence 503. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022 provides, in part:

- (a) Without limiting the amount or kind of information that is public information under this chapter, the following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

(1) a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body, except as provided by Section 552.108[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). The submitted information consists of completed investigation subject to section 552.022(a)(1). The district must release the submitted information pursuant to section 552.022(a)(1) unless it is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code or expressly made confidential under the Act or other law. Although you seek to withhold the submitted information under sections 552.103 and 552.107 of the Government Code, these sections are discretionary exceptions to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *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); Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 6 (2002) (attorney-client privilege under section 552.107 may be waived), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Thus, the district may not withhold the submitted information under section 552.103 or section 552.107 of the Government Code. However, we note the Texas Supreme Court has held the common-law informer's privilege is "other law" for the purpose of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001); *Tex. Comm'n on Envtl. Quality v. Abbott*, No. GB-300417 (126th Dist. Ct, Travis County, Tex.). Thus, we will consider your argument under the common-law informer's privilege for the information at issue. In addition, the Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Evidence are "other law" that make information expressly confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Therefore, we will consider your assertion of the attorney-client privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. Further, because sections 552.101, 552.135, and 552.137 of the Government Code make information confidential for purposes of section 552.022, we will consider the applicability of these exceptions to the submitted information.

Texas Rule of Evidence 503(b)(1) provides the following:

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 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 reasonably necessary to transmit the communication. *Id.* 503(a)(5).

Accordingly, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under rule 503, a governmental body must 1) show that 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 that the communication is confidential by explaining that it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and that it was made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client. *See* ORD 676. Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the entire communication is confidential under rule 503 provided the client has not waived the privilege or the communication does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 503(d). *Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein); *In re Valero Energy Corp.*, 973 S.W.2d 453, 457 (Tex. App.—Houston [14<sup>th</sup> Dist.] 1998, orig. proceeding) (privilege attaches to complete communication, including factual information).

You state the submitted information consists of communications between attorneys representing the district and district employees that were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the district. You state these communications were intended to be confidential and have remained confidential. Upon review, we find you have established the submitted information constitutes privileged attorney-client communications under rule 503. *See Harlandale Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Cornyn*, 25 S.W.3d 328 (Tex. App.—Austin 2000, pet. denied) (concluding attorney's entire investigative report was protected by attorney-client privilege where attorney was retained to conduct investigation in her capacity as attorney for purposes of providing legal service and advice). Thus, the district may withhold the submitted information under Texas Rule of Evidence 503.<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.

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,

Jennifer Copeland  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JC/jxd

Ref: ID# 850285

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)