



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 7, 2022

Mr. Montgomery Meitler
Senior Counsel
Office of General Counsel
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701-1494

OR2022-00658

Dear Mr. Meitler:

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# 923977 (PIR No. 50203).

The Texas Education Agency (the "agency") received a request for a specified memo sent from the agency to the Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") and communications between agency officials and the OAG regarding a specified executive order. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.107 of the Government Code. Additionally, you state release of the submitted information may implicate the interests of the OAG, which you state, and provide documentation demonstrating, the agency notified of the request for information and of its right to submit arguments to this office.¹ *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released). We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.²

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. *See id.* § 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.

¹ As of the date of this letter, we have not received comments from the OAG.

² We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

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 assert the submitted information consists of privileged communications between agency attorneys, agency employees, and other privileged parties in their capacities as clients. You state these communications were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the agency. Further, 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 agency may withhold the submitted information under section 552.107 of the Government Code.³

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->

³ As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure of this information.

[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,

Blake Brennan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BBX/mo

Ref: ID# 923977

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

c: Third Party
(w/o enclosures)