



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 16, 2022

Mr. Jacob Woolston
Interim General Counsel
Round Rock Independent School District
1311 Round Rock Avenue
Round Rock, Texas 78681

OR2022-13925

Dear Mr. Woolston:

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# 945230 (TPIA 2022-387).

The Round Rock Independent School District (the "district") received a request for communications in the possession of a named district official including certain terms during a stated time period.¹ 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.

¹ You state the district received clarification of the request for information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.222(b) (stating if information requested is unclear to governmental body or if large amount of information has been requested, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify or narrow request, but may not inquire into purpose for which information will be used); *City of Dallas v. Abbott*, 304 S.W.3d 380 (Tex. 2010) (holding when governmental entity, acting in good faith, requests clarification of unclear or overbroad request for public information, ten-business-day period to request attorney general opinion is measured from date request is clarified or narrowed). You also represent the district sent the requestor a cost estimate of charges pursuant to section 552.2615 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.222(b), .2615. The estimate of charges required the requestor to provide a deposit for payment of anticipated costs under section 552.263 of the Government Code. *See id.* § 552.263(a). You represent the district received the required deposit on March 31, 2022. *See id.* § 552.263(e) (if governmental body requires deposit or bond for anticipated costs pursuant to section 552.263, request for information is considered to have been received on date governmental body receives bond or deposit).

Initially, you represent, and we agree, some of the submitted information is not responsive to the instant request for information because it does not pertain to the specific information requested. This ruling does not address the public availability of any information that is not responsive to the request and the district is not required to release such information in response to this request.²

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 responsive information consists of communications involving the district’s attorney and district employees and officials. You state these communications were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the district. You state these communications were intended to be confidential and have been kept confidential. Based

² As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your arguments against disclosure of this information.

on your representations and our review, we find the district may generally withhold the responsive information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.³ We note, however, one of the e-mail strings at issue includes e-mails received from a non-privileged party. Furthermore, if these e-mails are removed from the e-mail string and stand alone, they are responsive to the request for information. Therefore, if these non-privileged e-mails, which we marked, are maintained by the district separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which they appear, then the district may not withhold these non-privileged e-mails under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.

To the extent the non-privileged e-mails we marked are maintained separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which they appear, the e-mails also include an e-mail address subject to section 552.137 of the Government Code.⁴ Section 552.137 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body” unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c). *See* Gov’t Code § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail address at issue is not excluded by subsection (c). Therefore, in the event the non-privileged e-mails we marked are maintained separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which they appear, the district must withhold the e-mail address we marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner affirmatively consents to its public disclosure.

In summary, the district may generally withhold the responsive information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code; however, if the non-privileged e-mails we marked are maintained by the district separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which they appear, then these non-privileged e-mails may not be withheld under section 552.107 of the Government Code. The district must release the non-privileged e-mails if they are maintained separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which they appear; however, in releasing the non-privileged e-mails, the district must withhold the e-mail address we marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner affirmatively consents to its public disclosure.

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.

⁴ The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

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Sincerely,

D. Michelle Case
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DMH/be

Ref: ID# 945230

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)