



KEN PAXTON  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 14, 2022

Mr. David Iglesias  
Counsel for Trinity County  
Iglesias Law Firm, P.L.L.C.  
605 Chase Drive, Suite 8  
Tyler, Texas 75701

OR2022-38674

Dear Mr. Iglesias:

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# 990008.

Tyler County (the "county"), which you represent, received a request for communications between two named individuals during a specified period of time. The county claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.104 and 552.107 of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> We have considered the claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.104(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information that a governmental body demonstrates, if released, would "harm its interests by providing an advantage to a competitor or bidder in a particular ongoing competitive situation or in a particular competitive situation where the governmental body establishes the situation at issue is set to reoccur or there is a specific and demonstrable intent to enter into the competitive situation again in the future." Gov't Code § 552.104(a). The "test under section 552.104 is whether knowing another bidder's [or competitor's information] would be an advantage, not whether it would be a decisive advantage." *Boeing Co. v. Paxton*, 466 S.W.3d 831, 841 (Tex. 2015). After review of the information at issue and consideration of the arguments, we find the county has failed to demonstrate the applicability of section 552.104 to the information at issue. Thus, we conclude the county may not withhold the information at issue under section 552.104(a).

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<sup>1</sup> Although the county also cites to section 552.109 of the Government Code, it has not submitted arguments explaining how this exception applies to the submitted information. Therefore, we presume the county no longer asserts this exception. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302.

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.* 503(b)(1), 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).

The county explains some of the submitted information consists of confidential communications between an attorney for and employees and officials of the county that were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services. The county also asserts the communications were intended to be confidential and their confidentiality has been maintained. Upon review, we find the county has demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to some of the information at issue, which we have marked. Thus, the county may withhold the information we have marked under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. However, we conclude the county has not established the remaining information consists of privileged attorney-client communications. Therefore, the county may not withhold this information under section 552.107. Accordingly, the county must release the remaining information.

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,

James L. Coggeshall  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JLC/jxd

Ref: ID# 990008

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)