

Court: Calif. cities' private lawyers' bills can go public

By Bob Egelko, San Francisco Chronicle

Local governments in California must release records of the amounts they've been billed by private lawyers for cases they handled, a divided state Supreme Court ruled Thursday.

In a 4-3 decision, the court said the attorney-client privilege – which makes most communications with lawyers confidential – doesn't apply to a public agency's financial dealings with private attorneys in cases that have been concluded. The ruling was at least a partial victory for advocacy groups and media organizations seeking more public disclosure of government records.

Cities and counties turn to private attorneys to handle legal proceedings that require resources or specialized personnel that the government agencies lack.

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