OFFICE of the ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

July 11, 2003

Ms. Sara Shiplet Waitt
Legal and Compliance Division
Texas Department of Insurance
P.O. Box 149104
Austin, Texas 78714-9104

OR2003-4801

Dear Ms. Waitt:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 184103.

The Texas Department of Insurance ("TDI") received a request for all information concerning appointment terminations by Farmers Insurance Group of Companies with regard to the requestor that were "canceled for cause." You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. You argue that the requested information is confidential under article 21.07, section 6B of the Insurance Code, which provides:

> (a) Each insurance carrier or agent shall, on termination of the appointment of an agent for cause, immediately file with the department a statement of the facts relating to the termination of the appointment and the date and cause of the termination. On receipt of the statement the department shall record the termination of the appointment of that agent to represent the insurance carrier in this state.

> (b) A document, record, statement, or other information required to be made or disclosed to the department under this section is a privileged and confidential communication and is not admissible in evidence in any court action or proceeding except under a subpoena issued by a court of record.

Ins. Code art. 21.07, § 6B(a), (b). Based on your representations and our review of the information, we understand that the requested information is information required to be disclosed to TDI under section 6B of article 21.07. Therefore, the requested information is confidential under section 6B(b) of article 21.07 and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

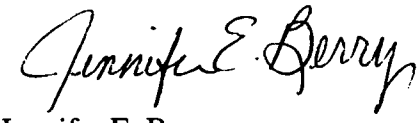
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Jennifer E. Berry
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JEB/sdk

Ref: ID# 184103

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. James H. Leach
Leach Insurance Agency
P.O. Box 828
El Campo, Texas 77437
(w/o enclosures)