ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 2, 2003

Ms. Alice Caruso
Assistant Disclosure Officer
Texas Workforce Commission
101 East 15th Street
Austin, Texas 78778-0001

OR2003-8599

Dear Ms. Caruso

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 191901.

The Texas Workforce Commission (the "commission") received a request for information pertaining to unemployment claims made, benefits received, and employment efforts made by the requestor's client. You advise that some of the requested information will be released to the requestor. You claim that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from required public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." You claim that the submitted information is confidential under federal law.[1] This office has stated that the regulations found at section 603 of title 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations send a clear message that "claim information" in the files of a state unemployment compensation agency is to be disclosed only to a "receiving agency," as defined in the regulations, or to other specified parties. *See* 20 C.F.R. §§ 603.1 *et seq.; see also* Open Records Decision No. 476 at 4 (1987). Otherwise, pursuant to section 603.7 of title 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations, state unemployment compensation agencies such as the commission must

[1] We note that a federal statute or an administrative regulation enacted pursuant to statutory authority can provide statutory confidentiality for purposes of section 552.101. *See* Open Records Decision No. 476 (1987) (addressing statutory predecessor).

protect the confidentiality of claim information. "Claim information" means information regarding whether an individual is receiving, has received, or has applied for unemployment compensation, as well as "[a]ny other information contained in the records of the State employment compensation agency which is needed by the requesting agency to verify eligibility for, and the amount of, benefits." *See* 20 C.F.R. § 603.2(c)(1), (5). We also note that the names of employers and employees who file unemployment compensation appeals fall within the definition of "claim information" and that the federal regulations prohibit the commission from disclosing this information. *See* Open Records Decision No. 476 at 4 (1987).

In this instance, the requestor has identified an unemployment claimant to whom the submitted information pertains. You state that the submitted information constitutes claim information. You inform us that the federal Social Security Act requires states to comply with the directives of the United States Department of Labor (the "labor department") in administering state UI programs and that a labor department directive, UI Program Letter No. 34-97, specifies the conditions under which such claim information may be released. You do not indicate, nor does it otherwise appear to this office, that any of the release provisions specified in the federal directive are applicable in this instance. Therefore, based on your representations and our review of the information in question, we conclude that this information is confidential under federal law. Therefore, the submitted information must be withheld from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your claim under section 552.107.

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,

Kristen Bates
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KAB/lmt

Ref: ID# 191901

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Charles A. Mouton
Preis, Kraft & Roy
520 Post Oak Blvd., Suite 800
Houston, TX 77027
(w/o enclosures)