



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 12, 2003

Ms. Sandra Smith
Executive Director
Texas Board of Chiropractic Examiners
333 Guadalupe, Suite 3-825
Austin, Texas 78701-3942

OR2003-8975

Dear Ms. Smith:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 192647.

The Texas Board of Chiropractic Examiners (the "board") received a request for records related to a named individual. You state that the board will provide the requestor with a portion of the requested information. However, you claim that some of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.102 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You assert that the submitted college transcripts are subject to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 ("FERPA"), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g.² FERPA provides that no federal funds will be made available under any applicable program to an educational agency or institution that releases personally identifiable information (other than directory information) contained in a student's education records to anyone but certain numerated federal, state, and local officials and institutions, unless otherwise authorized by the student's parent. *See* 20

¹We note that you failed to timely assert section 552.102 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b) (governmental body must state exceptions that apply not later than tenth day after receiving request). However, because this section is a mandatory exception, we will address your argument. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to section 552.302).

²FERPA is incorporated into the Public Information Act (the "Act") by section 552.101 of the Government Code, which excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision."

U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(1). "Education records" are those records, files, documents, and other materials which

- (i) contain information directly related to a student; and
- (ii) are *maintained by an educational agency or institution* or by a person acting for such agency or institution.

20 U.S.C. § 1232g(a)(4)(A) (emphasis added). The board is not an educational agency or institution under FERPA. Consequently, the records you seek to withhold are not "education records" as defined by FERPA. *See* Open Records Decision No. 390 (1983). Thus, FERPA is inapplicable to the submitted college transcripts, and they may not be withheld on that basis.

Section 552.101 also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy. Common-law privacy protects information if (1) the information contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) the information is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Industrial Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). The type of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* included information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. *Id.* at 683. Additionally, this office has found that the following types of information are excepted from required public disclosure under common-law privacy: some kinds of medical information or information indicating disabilities or specific illnesses, *see* Open Records Decision Nos. 470 (1987) (illness from severe emotional and job-related stress), 455 (1987) (prescription drugs, illnesses, operations, and physical handicaps), and information relating to drug overdoses, *see* Open Records Decision No. 343 (1982). Having reviewed the submitted transcripts, we conclude that they do not consist of information that is protected by common-law privacy. Consequently, they may not be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

You also assert section 552.102 of the Government Code in regard to the submitted transcripts. Section 552.102(a) excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy[.]" Section 552.102(b) excepts from disclosure "a transcript from an institution of higher education maintained in the personnel file of a professional public school employee[.]" Section 552.102 is applicable only to information contained in the personnel file of an employee of a governmental body. *See Hubert v. Harte-Hanks Tex. Newspapers, Inc.*, 652 S.W.2d 546, 549-51 (Tex. App.--Austin 1983, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision Nos. 473 at 3 (1987), 444 at 3-4 (1986), 423 at 2 (1984). As you have failed to demonstrate that the submitted transcripts relate to a governmental employee, section 552.102 of the Government Code is inapplicable to them, and the transcripts must be released.

Next, you assert that the remaining submitted information consists of records relating to a chiropractor. Chapter 201 of the Occupations Code governs the practice of chiropractic. Section 201.042 of the Occupations Code provides in part:

(a) Communications between a chiropractor and a patient relating to or in connection with any professional services provided by a chiropractor to the patient are confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this subchapter.

(b) Records of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by a chiropractor that are created or maintained by a chiropractor are confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this subchapter.

(c) A person who receives information from the confidential communications or records, excluding a person listed in Section 201.404(a) who is acting on the patient's behalf, may not disclose the information except to the extent that disclosure is consistent with the authorized purposes for which the information was first obtained.

Occ. Code § 201.402(a)-(c). Chapter 201 includes exceptions to confidentiality and consent provisions. *See id.* §§ 201.403, 404, 405. We agree that most of the remaining submitted information is subject to chapter 201. Therefore, the board may release this information only if chapter 201 of the Occupations Code permits the board to do so. However, we have marked the submitted documents that are not subject to chapter 201 of the Occupations Code and may not be withheld on that basis.

Finally, we note that social security numbers must be withheld in some circumstances under section 552.101 in conjunction with the 1990 amendments to the federal Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 405(c)(2)(C)(viii)(I). *See* Open Records Decision No. 622 (1994). These amendments make confidential social security numbers and related records that are obtained and maintained by a state agency or political subdivision of the state pursuant to any provision of law enacted on or after October 1, 1990. *See id.* We have no basis for concluding that the social security numbers in the responsive information are confidential under section 405(c)(2)(C)(viii)(I), and therefore excepted from public disclosure under section 552.101 of the Act on the basis of that federal provision. We caution, however, that section 552.352 of the Act imposes criminal penalties for the release of confidential information. Prior to releasing any social security number information, the board should ensure that no such information was obtained or is maintained by the board pursuant to any provision of law enacted on or after October 1, 1990.

In summary, we conclude that the board may release most of the submitted information only if chapter 201 of the Occupations Code permits the board to do so. The college transcripts

and the information we have marked must be released. However, the submitted social security numbers may be confidential under federal law.

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,



W. Montgomery Meitler
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

WMM/Imt

Ref: ID# 192647

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Susan Rogers
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