



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

October 19, 2004

Ms. Margo M. Kaiser  
Open Records Attorney  
Texas Workforce Commission  
101 East 15<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas 78778-0001

OR2004-8894

Dear Ms. Kaiser:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 211232.

The Texas Workforce Commission (the "commission") received a request for information relating to a named individual's unemployment records. You state that the commission will release some of the requested information. 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 representative sample of responsive information you submitted.<sup>1</sup>

Section 552.101 excepts from public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses information that other statutes make confidential.<sup>2</sup> We note that the regulations found at section 603 of title 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations send a clear

---

<sup>1</sup>This letter ruling assumes that the submitted information is truly representative of the requested information as a whole. This ruling neither reaches nor authorizes the commission to withhold any information that is substantially different from the submitted information. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(e)(1)(D), .302; Open Records Decision Nos. 499 at 6 (1988), 497 at 4 (1988).

<sup>2</sup>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).

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.*; Open Records Decision No. 476 at 4 (1987). Otherwise, under section 603.7 of title 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations, state unemployment compensation agencies such as the commission must 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.” 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).

You also argue that the federal Social Security Act requires states to comply with the directives of the United States Department of Labor (the “department”) in administering state unemployment insurance (“UI”) programs and that a department directive, UI Program Letter No. 34-97, specifies the conditions under which such claim information may be released. However, you do not inform us whether the release provisions of either part 603 or the UI Letter apply in this instance. Accordingly, we conclude that to the extent that any of the release provisions in UI Program Letter No. 34-97 or part 603 of title 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations are applicable to any of the submitted information, the commission must release any such information to the requestor in accordance with the UI Letter or part 603. *See* UI Program Letter 34-97 (allowing disclosure to “private entity under a written agreement which requires ‘informed consent’ from the individual to whom the information pertains”); *see also* 20 C.F.R. pt. 603. Otherwise, the commission must withhold the submitted information in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with these provisions of federal law. 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).

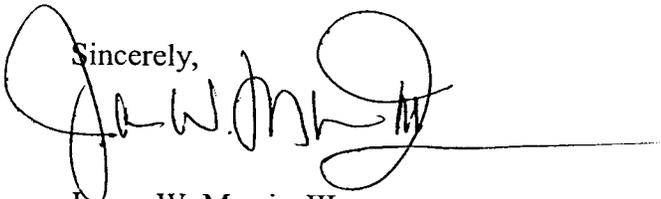
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James W. Morris, III", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

James W. Morris, III  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JWM/sdk

Ref: ID# 211232

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. F. Denise Russell  
Holland & Knight LLP  
112 East Pecan Street, Suite 2700  
San Antonio, Texas 78205-1512  
(w/o enclosures)