



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 25, 2004

Mr. Bryan P. Fowler
The Fowler Law Firm, LLP
Conroe Tower, Suite 510
300 West Davis
Conroe, Texas 77301

OR2004-9079

Dear Mr. Fowler:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 211548.

The City of Montgomery (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for 46 categories of information related to a pending criminal case in Montgomery County. You claim that the request was subsequently amended to include only 1) the training and certification records pertaining to the detector dog allegedly utilized in connection with the arrest at issue, and 2) the complete personnel files of any law enforcement officer involved in the case. You state that some of the responsive information has already been released, but claim that some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.117, 552.119 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

¹ We assume the representative sample of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach and, therefore, does not authorize the withholding of any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov’t Code § 552.101. The submitted information includes medical records, access to which is governed by the Medical Practice Act (the “MPA”), chapter 159 of the Occupations Code. Section 159.002 of the MPA provides in part:

(b) A record of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by a physician that is created or maintained by a physician is confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.

(c) A person who receives information from a confidential communication or record as described by this chapter, other than a person listed in Section 159.004 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 § 159.002(b), (c). Medical records must be released upon the patient’s signed, written consent, provided that the consent specifies (1) the information to be covered by the release, (2) reasons or purposes for the release, and (3) the person to whom the information is to be released. *Id.* §§ 159.004, .005. Section 159.002(c) also requires that any subsequent release of medical records be consistent with the purposes for which the governmental body obtained the records. Open Records Decision No. 565 at 7 (1990). Medical records may be released only as provided under the MPA. Open Records Decision No. 598 (1991). The medical records we have marked may only be released in accordance with the MPA.

The submitted information also includes an L-2 Declaration of Medical Condition and an L-3 Declaration of Psychological and Emotional Health required by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (the “commission”) that are confidential pursuant to section 1701.306 of the Occupations Code. Section 1701.306 provides as follows:

(a) The commission may not issue a license to a person as an officer or county jailer unless the person is examined by:

(1) a licensed psychologist or by a psychiatrist who declares in writing that the person is in satisfactory psychological and emotional health to serve as the type of officer for which a license is sought; and

(2) a licensed physician who declares in writing that the person does not show any trace of drug dependency or illegal drug use after a physical examination, blood test, or other medical test.

(b) An agency hiring a person for whom a license as an officer or county jailer is sought shall select the examining physician and the examining psychologist or psychiatrist. The agency shall prepare a report of each declaration required by Subsection (a) and shall maintain a copy of the report on file in a format readily accessible to the commission. A declaration is not public information.

Occ. Code § 1701.306. Therefore, the city must withhold the marked declarations under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 1701.306 of the Occupations Code.

We note that the submitted information contains a Report of Separation of License Holder (F-5) which is made confidential by section 1701.454 of the Occupations Code. Section 1701.454 provides in relevant part:

(a) A report or statement submitted to the commission under this subchapter is confidential and is not subject to disclosure under Chapter 552 of the Government Code.

Occ. Code § 1701.454. Therefore, the city must withhold the F-5 form pursuant to section 552.101 in conjunction with section 1701.454 of the Occupations Code.

Section 552.101 also encompasses the common law right of privacy, which protects information if it (1) contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). The types 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. In addition, this office has found that the following types of information are excepted from required public disclosure under common law privacy: an individual's criminal history when compiled by a governmental body, *see* Open Records Decision No. 565 (citing *United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749 (1989)); personal financial information not relating to a financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body, *see* Open Records Decision Nos. 600 (1992), 545 (1990); 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 identities of victims of sexual abuse, *see* Open Records Decision Nos. 440 (1986), 393 (1983), 339 (1982). Accordingly, we have marked financial and medical information in the submitted documents that must be withheld pursuant to section 552.101 and common law privacy. However, we find that some of the information you have marked is not highly intimate or embarrassing for the purpose of common law privacy. *See generally* Open Records Decision

Nos. 554 at 3 (1990) (disclosure of person's home address and telephone number is not invasion of privacy), 455 at 7 (1987) (birth dates, names and addresses of character references are not protected by privacy). Accordingly, this information, which we have marked, may not be withheld under section 552.101 on this basis.

You also contend that some of the submitted information may be excepted from disclosure under section 552.117 of the Government Code. Section 552.117(a)(2) excepts from public disclosure a peace officer's home address and telephone number, social security number, and family member information regardless of whether the peace officer made an election under section 552.024 of the Government Code. Section 552.117(a)(2) applies to peace officers as defined by article 2.12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. You state that the officers whose personnel files are the subject of this request are peace officers under article 2.12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Based on this assertion, the city must withhold most of the information it has marked under section 552.117(a)(2). We have also marked additional information subject to section 552.117(a)(2) that the city must also withhold. We note that section 552.117 is applicable only to a personal pager or cellular phone number paid for by the peace officer. *See* Open Records Decision No. 670 at 6 (2001) (statutory predecessor to section 552.117(a)(2) encompassed personal cellular phone numbers and personal pager numbers of peace officers who purchased cellular or pager service with their personal funds). Thus, if the listed pager and cellular phone numbers were provided to a peace officer at public expense, these numbers may not be withheld under section 552.117. *See* Open Records Decision No. 506 at 5-7 (1988) (statutory predecessor to section 552.117 not applicable to cellular mobile phone numbers provided and paid for by governmental body and intended for official use). The remaining information the city has marked, including work telephone numbers, is not protected under section 552.117(a)(2). We have marked this information accordingly, and it must be released to the requestor.

You also claim that some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.130 of the Government Code, which provides, in relevant part:

(a) Information is excepted from the requirement of Section 552.021 if the information relates to:

(1) a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state; [or]

(2) a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state[.]

Gov't Code § 552.130(a). Therefore, you must also withhold the Texas driver's license numbers you have marked, as well as information we have marked under section 552.130.² We note that some of the submitted information is subject to section 552.136 of the Government Code, which states that "[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential." Gov't Code § 552.136.³ Accordingly, the city must withhold the policy numbers and bank account information we have marked under section 552.136.

We note that the submitted information contains an e-mail address that is excepted under section 552.137, which provides:

(a) Except as otherwise provided by this section, an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body is confidential and not subject to disclosure under this chapter.

(b) Confidential information described by this section that relates to a member of the public may be disclosed if the member of the public affirmatively consents to its release.

(c) Subsection (a) does not apply to an e-mail address:

(1) provided to a governmental body by a person who has a contractual relationship with the governmental body or by the contractor's agent;

(2) provided to a governmental body by a vendor who seeks to contract with the governmental body or by the vendor's agent;

(3) contained in a response to a request for bids or proposals, contained in a response to similar invitations soliciting offers or information relating to a potential contract, or provided to a governmental body in the course of negotiating the terms of a contract or potential contract; or

² Because we reach this conclusion under section 552.130, we need not reach your section 552.119 claim.

³ The Office of the Attorney General will raise mandatory exceptions like sections 552.136 and 552.137 on behalf of a governmental body but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

(4) provided to a governmental body on a letterhead, coversheet, printed document, or other document made available to the public.

(d) Subsection (a) does not prevent a governmental body from disclosing an e-mail address for any reason to another governmental body or to a federal agency.

Gov't Code § 552.137. Section 552.137(a) is applicable to certain e-mail addresses of members of the public that are provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body, unless the individual to whom the e-mail address belongs has affirmatively consented to its public disclosure. Section 552.137(a) is not applicable to the types of e-mail addresses listed in section 552.137(c) or to an institutional e-mail address, an Internet website address, or an e-mail address that a governmental entity maintains for one of its officials or employees. Therefore, the city must withhold as confidential under section 552.137 the marked e-mail address found in the submitted documentation, unless the owner of the e-mail address has affirmatively consented to its public disclosure. As you raise no additional arguments against disclosure, all remaining information must be released.

In summary, the medical records we have marked may only be released in accordance with the MPA. The city must withhold the marked declarations under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 1701.306 of the Occupations Code. The city must withhold the F-5 form pursuant to section 552.101 in conjunction with section 1701.454 of the Occupations Code. The city must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 in conjunction with common law privacy. The city must withhold the marked information under sections 552.117, 552.130 and 552.136. To the extent that the marked personal pager or cell phone numbers were paid for by peace officers, the city must also withhold these numbers under section 552.117(a)(2). The city must withhold as confidential under section 552.137 the marked e-mail address, unless the owner of the e-mail address has affirmatively consented to its public disclosure. All remaining information must be released.

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).

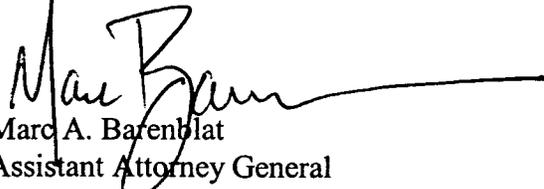
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following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


Marc A. Barenblat
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MAB/jh

Ref: ID# 211548

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Stephen D. Jackson
Law Offices of Stephen D. Jackson
318 North Main
Conroe, Texas 77301
(w/o enclosures)