



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

October 27, 2004

Mr. Carey E. Smith  
General Counsel  
Texas Health and Human Services Commission  
P. O. Box 13247  
Austin, Texas 78711

OR2004-9174

Dear Mr. Smith:

You have asked whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 215838.

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (the "commission") received a request for contracts with a certain psychiatrist and pharmacist, the identities of residential treatment centers and foster care providers for which the named individuals have provided services or filled prescriptions since January 2001, and a list of pharmacies filling Medicaid drug prescriptions and their Medicaid vendor drug numbers. The commission has released the names and addresses of the pharmacies but claims the Medicaid vendor drug numbers are excepted from public disclosure under section 552.136 of the Government Code. Furthermore, the commission states it does not have the remaining information and has referred the requestor to the Department of Family and Protective Services.

Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply not later than the tenth business day after the date of receiving the written request. The commission states it received the present request for information on October 7, 2004. The commission deposited its request for a decision from this office on October 22, 2004. *See* Gov't Code § 552.308(b). Consequently, the commission failed to comply with section 552.301(b) of the Government Code.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the information is public and must be released. Information that is presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information to

overcome this presumption. *See 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 Gov't Code § 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). This office has held that a compelling reason exists to withhold information when the information is confidential by another source of law. *See* Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977) (presumption of openness overcome by a showing that the information is made confidential by another source of law or affects third party interests). The applicability of section 552.136 is such a compelling reason.

Section 552.136 provides:

(a) In this section, “access device” means a card, plate, code, account number, personal identification number, electronic serial number, mobile identification number, or other telecommunications service, equipment, or instrument identifier or means of account access that alone or in conjunction with another access device may be used to:

- (1) obtain money, goods, services, or another thing of value;  
or
- (2) initiate a transfer of funds other than a transfer originated solely by paper instrument.

(b) Notwithstanding 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. The commission explains that the Medicaid vendor drug numbers are Medicaid provider numbers assigned to providers who have been accepted into the Medicaid program. You state that these numbers are assigned for identification and billing purposes. As such, they “may be used to obtain money from the Medicaid program or to initiate the transfer of funds from the program.” Based on these representations, we conclude that the Medicaid vendor drug numbers that you have marked are excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.136 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 of 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,



Yen-Ha Le  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

YHL/sdk

Ref: ID# 215838

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Shelley Kofler  
WFAA-TV Austin Bureau  
1005 Congress Avenue, Suite 440  
Austin, Texas 78701  
(w/o enclosures)