



**ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS**  
**GREG ABBOTT**

December 8, 2004

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

OR2004-10410

Dear Ms. Smith:

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# 214749.

The Texas Board of Chiropractic Examiners (the "board") received a request for a copy of the board's complete file on a named chiropractor. You assert that you have released some of the requested information, but claim that some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.026, 552.101, 552.114, 552.130, 552.136, and 552.137 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from required public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Section 552.101 encompasses information that other statutes make confidential. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 ("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 enumerated federal, state, and local officials and institutions, unless otherwise authorized by the student's parent.<sup>1</sup> See 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(1). "Education records" means those records that contain information directly related to a student and are maintained by an educational agency or

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<sup>1</sup> Section 552.026 incorporates FERPA into chapter 552 of the Government Code.

institution or by a person acting for such agency or institution. *Id.* § 1232g(a)(4)(A). The board is not an educational agency or institution.

FERPA provides, however, that an educational agency or institution may only transfer personal information to a third party "on the condition that such party will not permit any other party to have access to such information without the written consent of the parents of the student." *Id.* § 1232g(b)(4)(B). The federal regulations provide that a third party that receives such information from an educational agency may use the information only for the purposes for which the disclosure was made. *See* 34 C.F.R. § 99.33(a)(2). You state that the submitted transcripts are all original transcripts received directly from the educational institutions. Based on this representation, pursuant to sections 1232g(b)(4)(B) and 99.33(a)(2), the board may only release the transcripts upon consent of the individual to whom the transcripts pertain.<sup>2</sup>

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also incorporates section 58.001 of the Occupations Code. This section provides as follows:

The social security number of an applicant for or holder of a license, certificate of registration, or other legal authorization issued by a licensing agency to practice in a specific occupation or profession that is provided to the licensing agency is confidential and not subject to disclosure under Chapter 552, Government Code.

Occ. Code § 58.001. Therefore, pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 58.001 of the Occupations Code, the board must withhold from disclosure the chiropractor's social security number.

You also contend that portions of the submitted information are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 201.402 of the Occupations Code. Chapter 201 of the Occupations Code governs the practice of chiropractic. Section 201.402 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.

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<sup>2</sup> As our determinations under FERPA are dispositive, we need not address your arguments under section 552.114.

(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 have marked the information that is subject to section 201.402 of the Occupations Code. The board may release this information only if chapter 201 of the Occupations Code permits the board to do so.<sup>3</sup>

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of common law privacy. Common law privacy 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). This office has found that some kinds of medical information or information indicating disabilities or specific illnesses are excepted from required public disclosure under common law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 470 (1987) (illness from severe emotional and job-related stress), 455 (1987) (prescription drugs, illnesses, operations, and physical handicaps). We note that the right of privacy lapses at death; thus, information may not be withheld on the basis of the privacy interests of a deceased individual. *See Moore v. Charles B. Pierce Film Enters. Inc.*, 589 S.W.2d 489 (Tex. Civ. App.—Texarkana 1979, writ ref'd n.r.e.); *see also* Attorney General Opinions JM-229 (1984); H-917 (1976); Open Records Decision No. 272 at 1 (1981). We have marked the information that must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common law right to privacy.

You also raise section 552.130 of the Government Code. This section excepts from public disclosure information that relates to “a motor vehicle operator’s or driver’s license or permit issued by an agency of this state[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.130(a)(1). Accordingly, we have marked the Texas driver’s license numbers in Exhibit D that you must withhold under section 552.130.

You also claim that some of the submitted information is excepted under 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. You indicate that the submitted documents contain “access device numbers,” which you appear to have marked. However, you have not explained how or why some of this information comes within the scope of section 552.136(a). Furthermore, we note that section 552.136 was enacted to protect the privacy of an individual; thus, the protection

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<sup>3</sup> Because we reach this conclusion, we need not reach your arguments against disclosure under the Medical Practice Act.

extinguishes upon the individual's death. *See Moore*, 589 S.W.2d at 491. Therefore, the board must only withhold the bank account number we have marked under section 552.136, and the board must release any insurance policy numbers pertaining to deceased individuals.

Lastly, we address your claim under section 552.137. As amended by the 78<sup>th</sup> Legislature, this section provides as follows:

- (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
  - (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 board must withhold as confidential under section 552.137 the marked e-mail addresses found in Exhibit C, unless the owner of a particular e-mail address has affirmatively consented to its public disclosure.

In summary, the board may release transcripts received directly from educational institutions only upon consent of the chiropractor to whom the transcripts pertain, as provided by section 1232g(b)(4)(B) of title 20 of the United States Code and section 99.33(a)(2) of title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The board must withhold the social security number we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 58.001 of the Occupations Code. The board may release the marked information under chapter 201 of the Occupations Code only if chapter 201 of the Occupations Code permits the board to do so. The board must withhold the marked information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common law right to privacy, and the Texas driver's license numbers under section 552.130. The board must withhold the bank account number we have marked under section 552.136. The board must withhold the e-mail address of a member of the public under section 552.137, unless the owner of the e-mail address has affirmatively consented to its public disclosure. The board must release the remaining submitted information.

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. Barenblatt  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MAB/jh

Ref: ID# 214749

Enc: Submitted documents

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