ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 3, 2005

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

OR2005-03798

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# 226169.

The Texas Board of Chiropractic Examiners (the "board") received two requests from the same requestor for information pertaining to a named chiropractor. You state that the board is providing some information to the requestor, and claim that the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.026, 552.114, and 552.137 of the Government Code, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 ("FERPA"), section 1232g of Title 20 of the United States Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

The submitted information includes the chiropractor's transcripts. Section 552.026 of the Government Code incorporates FERPA into the Public Information Act, and section 552.114 excepts from disclosure "information in a student record at an educational institution funded wholly or partly by state revenue." This office generally has treated "student record" information excepted under section 552.114(a) as the equivalent of "education record" information that is protected by FERPA. *See* Open Records Decision No. 634 at 6-8 (1995).

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. *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 institution or by a person acting for such agency or institution. *Id.* § 1232g(a)(4)(A).

While the board is not an educational agency or institution, FERPA also governs access to information in education records transferred by an educational agency or institution to a third party. 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). 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. 34 C.F.R. § 99.33(a)(2). You state that the board received the submitted transcripts from an educational institution. Accordingly, pursuant to sections 1232g(b)(4)(B) and 99.33(a)(2), we determine that the board may only release the transcripts upon consent of the named chiropractor.

You have also marked the chiropractor's e-mail address. Section 552.137 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body" unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is specifically excluded by section 552.137(c). *See* Gov't Code § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail address at issue is not specifically excluded by section 552.137(c). Thus, unless the chiropractor at issue has consented to its release, we agree the board must withhold the e-mail address pursuant to section 552.137(a).

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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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); *Tex. 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 ten calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

David R. Saldivar
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DRS/seg

Ref: ID# 226169

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Janet Ingram
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(w/o enclosures)