ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 11, 2006

Ms. Margo M. Kaiser
Staff Attorney
Open Records Unit
Texas Workforce Commission
101 East 15th Street, Room 266
Austin, Texas 78778-0001

OR2006-09116

Dear Ms. Kaiser:

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# 257477.

The Texas Workforce Commission (the "commission") received a request for specified housing discrimination complaints and information pertaining to two named commission employees. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, 552.117, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.[1]

Initially, we note that you have not submitted the requested housing discrimination complaints for our review. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(D). As you have not submitted the complaints, we assume the commission has released this information to the extent it existed on the date the commission received this request. If not, the commission must do so at this time. *See id.* §§ 552.006, .301, .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (noting that if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible).

---

[1]We assume that 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 that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

Next, we note, and you acknowledge, that the commission has not complied with the time periods prescribed by section 552.301 of the Government Code in seeking an open records decision from this office. When a governmental body fails to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301, the information at issue is presumed public. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ); *City of Houston v. Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co.*, 673 S.W.2d 316, 323 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). To overcome this presumption, the governmental body must show a compelling reason to withhold the information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302; *Hancock*, 797 S.W.2d at 381. Because sections 552.101, 552.102, 552.117, and 552.147 of the Government Code can provide compelling reasons to withhold information, we will address your arguments under these provisions.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by other statutes such as the Medical Practice Act ("MPA"), chapter 159 of the Occupations Code. Section 159.002 of the Occupations Code provides in pertinent 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). Information that is subject to the MPA includes both medical records and information obtained from those medical records. *See id.* §§ 159.002, .004; Open Records Decision No. 598 (1991). This office has concluded that the protection afforded by section 159.002 extends only to records created by either a physician or someone under the supervision of a physician. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 487 (1987), 370 (1983), 343 (1982).

Medical records may be released only as provided under the MPA. Open Records Decision No. 598 (1991). Such 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. Occ. Code §§ 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). We have reviewed the submitted information and marked the medical records subject to the MPA. Absent the

applicability of an MPA access provision, the commission must withhold these medical records pursuant to the MPA.[2]

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses information protected by section 402.083 of the Labor Code. Section 402.083(a) of the Labor Code states that "[i]nformation in or derived from a claim file regarding an employee is confidential and may not be disclosed by the [Texas Workers' Compensation Commission (the "TWCC")] except as provided by this subtitle." Labor Code § 402.083(a). In Open Records Decision No. 533 (1989), the City of Brownsville received a request for similar information. This office construed the predecessor to section 402.083(a) to apply only to information that the governmental body obtained from the Industrial Accident Board, subsequently the TWCC, and now the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (the "division"). You claim that item numbers 43 and 44 on the submitted "Detail of Claim No. WC2009371" were obtained from the division. We note, however, that the document at issue does not contain any items numbered 43 and 44. Furthermore, after our review, we cannot determine that any of the remaining information was obtained from the TWCC or the division. Therefore, we conclude that the remaining information is not confidential under section 402.083 and may not be withheld under section 552.101 on that basis.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of common law privacy. Section 552.102(a) of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure "information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy[.]" Section 552.102 is applicable to information that relates to public officials and employees. *See* Open Records Decision No. 327 at 2 (1982) (anything relating to employee's employment and its terms constitutes information relevant to person's employment relationship and is part of employee's personnel file). The privacy analysis under section 552.102(a) is the same as the common law privacy standard under section 552.101. *See Hubert v. Harte-Hanks Tex. Newspapers, Inc.*, 652 S.W.2d 546, 549-51 (Tex. App.—Austin 1983, writ ref'd n.r.e.) (addressing statutory predecessor). We will therefore consider the applicability of common law privacy under section 552.101 together with your claim regarding section 552.102.

In *Industrial Foundation v. Texas Industrial Accident Board*, 540 S.W.2d 668 (Tex. 1976), the Texas Supreme Court held that information is protected by common law privacy 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 a legitimate concern to the public. *See Indus. Found.*, 540 S.W.2d at 685. To demonstrate the applicability of common law privacy, both prongs of this test must be satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. However, information pertaining to the work conduct and job performance of public employees is subject to a legitimate public interest and therefore generally not protected from disclosure under common law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 423 at 2 (1984) (scope of public employee privacy

---

[2]As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against the disclosure of this information.

is narrow). We have reviewed the remaining information and find that none of it contains intimate or embarrassing facts the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person. Therefore, none of the remaining information is confidential under the doctrine of common law privacy, and it may not be withheld under either section 552.101 or section 552.102.

Section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure the home address and telephone number, social security number, and family member information of current or former employees of a governmental body who request that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(1). Whether a particular piece of information is protected by section 552.117 must be determined at the time the request for it is made. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). The commission may only withhold information under section 552.117(a)(1) on behalf of current or former employees who made a request for confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date on which the request for this information was made. You state that the employee at issue made a timely election under section 552.024 to keep her personal information confidential. Therefore, the personal information we have marked must be withheld under section 552.117 of the Government Code.

In summary, the commission may only release the marked medical records in accordance with the MPA. The commission must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.117 of the Government Code. The 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, 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); *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 Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,

James A. Person III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JAP/dh

Ref: ID# 257477

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Michael L. Buesgens
500 East Stassney, Apartment 1023
Austin, Texas 78745
(w/o enclosures)