



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 29, 2006

Mr. Warren Spencer
Legal Advisor
Plano Police Department
Office of the Police Legal Advisor
P. O. Box 860358
Plano, Texas 75086-0358

OR2006-11383

Dear Mr. Spencer:

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# 261319.

The Plano Police Department (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident involving a vehicular accident. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. You believe that some of the information may be protected because it documents emergency medical service ("EMS"). Access to EMS records is governed by the provisions of the Emergency Medical Services Act, sections 773.091 through 773.173 of Health and Safety Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 598 (1991). Section 773.091(b) provides as follows:

Records of the identity, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by emergency medical services personnel or by a physician providing medical supervision that are created by the emergency medical services personnel or physician or maintained by an emergency medical services provider are confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.

Health & Safety Code § 773.091(b). This confidentiality provision “does not extend to information regarding the presence, nature of injury or illness, age, sex, occupation, and city of residence of a patient who is receiving emergency medical services.” *Id.* § 773.091(g). Upon review, however, we find that none of the submitted information constitutes EMS records. Thus, none of this information may be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code on the basis of section 773.091(b) of the Health and Safety Code.

Next, we understand you to assert that some of the submitted information may be protected under the doctrines of common-law privacy and constitutional privacy, both of which are also encompassed by section 552.101. 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. *See Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). The type 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 some kinds of medical information or information indicating disabilities or specific illnesses is protected by 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 have marked the information in the submitted records that must be withheld under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Constitutional privacy consists of two interrelated types of privacy: (1) the right to make certain kinds of decisions independently; and (2) an individual’s interest in avoiding disclosure of personal matters. Open Records Decision No. 455 at 4 (1987). The first type protects an individual’s autonomy within “zones of privacy” which include matters related to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relationships, and child rearing and education. *Id.* The second type of constitutional privacy requires a balancing between the individual’s privacy interests and the public’s need to know information of public concern. *Id.* The scope of information protected under constitutional privacy is narrower than that under the common-law doctrine of privacy; the information must concern the “most intimate aspects of human affairs.” *Id.* at 5 (citing *Ramie v. City of Hedwig Village*, 765 F.2d 490 (5th Cir. 1985)). We have considered your arguments and reviewed the information at issue. We conclude, however, that you have not shown that any of the remaining information comes within one of the constitutional zones of privacy or involves the most intimate aspects of human affairs. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 470, 455, 444, 423 at 2. Therefore, none of the remaining submitted information may be withheld under section 552.101 on the basis of constitutional privacy.

Lastly, we note that the remaining submitted information includes Texas motor vehicle record information that is subject to section 552.130 of the Government Code.¹ This section excepts from disclosure information that relates to a driver's license or motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state. Gov't Code § 552.130. Therefore, the department must withhold the Texas motor vehicle record information we have marked pursuant to section 552.130.

To conclude, the department must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy and the information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The remaining submitted information must be released to the requestor.

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 ten 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

¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception like section 552.130 on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. See Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

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 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 ten calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Rapfogel
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RBR/eb

Ref: ID# 261319

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Danielle Johnson
Patient Account Representative
CareFlite
P. O. Box 610489
Dallas, Texas 75261-0489
(w/o enclosures)