



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 10, 2007

Ms. Amy S. McHugh
Assistant City Attorney
City of Cedar Park
600 North Bell Blvd.
Cedar Park, Texas 78613

OR2007-05691

Dear A.S. McHugh:

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# 278103.

The Cedar Park Police Department (the "department") received a request for information relating to a vehicular accident that occurred on December 11, 2005. You state that you have released some information to the requestor. You claim that the submitted 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.

Initially, we note that the information in Exhibit C was obtained pursuant to a grand jury subpoena. The judiciary is expressly excluded from the requirements of the Act. *See* Gov't Code § 552.003(1)(B). This office has determined that a grand jury, for purposes of the Act, is a part of the judiciary and therefore not subject to the Act. *See* Open Records Decision No. 411 (1984). Further, records kept by another person or entity acting as an agent for a grand jury are considered to be in the constructive possession of the grand jury and therefore not subject to the Act. *See* Open Records Decisions Nos. 513 (1988), 411, 398 (1983); *but see* ORD 513 at 4 (defining limits of judiciary exclusion). The fact that information collected or prepared by another person or entity is submitted to the grand jury does not necessarily mean that such information is in the grand jury's constructive possession when the same information is also held in the other person's or entity's own capacity. Information held by another person or entity but not produced at the direction of the grand jury may well

be protected under one of the Act's specific exceptions to disclosure, but such information is not excluded from the reach of the Act by the judiciary exclusion. *See* ORD 513. Therefore, to the extent that the information in Exhibit C is held by the department as an agent of the grand jury, such information is in the grand jury's constructive possession and is not subject to the Act. The rest of this decision is not applicable to such information. To the extent that the information in Exhibit C is not held by the department as an agent of the grand jury, so as to be subject to the Act, we consider it with the remaining submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses information that another statute makes confidential. Medical records are confidential under the Medical Practice Act (the "MPA"), subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code. *See* Occ. Code § 151.001. Section 159.002 of the MPA provides in part:

(a) A communication between a physician and a patient, relative to or in connection with any professional services as a physician to the patient, is confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.

(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.

Id. § 159.002(a)-(c). This office has determined that in governing access to a specific subset of information, the MPA prevails over the more general provisions of the Act. *See* Open Records Decision No. 598 (1991). We also have concluded that when a file is created as the result of a hospital stay, all of the documents in the file that relate to diagnosis and treatment constitute either physician-patient communications or records of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by a physician that are created or maintained by a physician. *See* Open Records Decision No. 546 (1990). Medical records must be released on 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. *See* Occ. Code §§ 159.004, .005. Any subsequent release of medical records must be consistent with the purposes for which the governmental body obtained the records. *See id.* § 159.002(c); Open Records Decision No. 565 at 7 (1990). We find that most of the information in Exhibit C constitutes medical

records that may only be released in accordance with the MPA. The department must release the marked records that are not records of the diagnosis and treatment of a patient or are not records created and maintained by a physician.

The department claims that the information in Exhibit D contains information compiled and maintained by the Texas Crime Information Center ("TCIC"). Section 552.101 encompasses criminal history record information ("CHRI") generated by the National Crime Information Center or by the Texas Crime Information Center. Title 28, part 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations governs the release of CHRI that states obtain from the federal government or other states. Open Records Decision No. 565 (1990). The federal regulations allow each state to follow its individual law with respect to CHRI it generates. *Id.* Section 411.083 of the Government Code deems confidential CHRI that the Texas Department of Public Safety ("DPS") maintains, except that the DPS may disseminate this information as provided in chapter 411, subchapter F of the Government Code. *See Gov't Code* § 411.083. Sections 411.083(b)(1) and 411.089(a) authorize a criminal justice agency to obtain CHRI; however, a criminal justice agency may not release CHRI except to another criminal justice agency for a criminal justice purpose. *Id.* § 411.089(b)(1). Other entities specified in chapter 411 of the Government Code are entitled to obtain CHRI from DPS or another criminal justice agency; however, those entities may not release CHRI except as provided by chapter 411. *See generally id.* §§ 411.090 - .127. Upon review, we agree that the Exhibit D contains some CHRI made confidential by section 411.083. Thus, the department must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis.

Section 552.101 also encompasses common-law privacy, which protects information that is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, such that its release would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668 (Tex. 1976). This office has found that personal financial information not relating to a financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body is generally intimate and embarrassing. *See* Open Records Decision No. 545 (1990). The marked lien information constitutes personal financial information. Further, we find that there is not a legitimate public interest in the release of this information. Accordingly, the department must withhold the marked lien information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

In addition, this office has found that a compilation of an individual's criminal history is highly embarrassing information, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person. *Cf. United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749, 764 (1989) (when considering prong regarding individual's privacy interest, court recognized distinction between public records found in courthouse files and local police stations and compiled summary of information and noted that individual has significant privacy interest in compilation of one's criminal history). Furthermore, we find that a compilation of a private citizen's criminal history is generally not of legitimate concern

to the public. However, in this instance, the requestor has a right of access to his client's private information. *See* Gov't Code 552.023 (person or person's authorized representative has special right of access to information relating to person and protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect that person's privacy interests).

Section 552.130 of the Government Code exempts from disclosure information that "relates to . . . a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state [or] a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state."¹ *Id.* § 552.130. In accordance with section 552.130 of the Government Code, the department must withhold the Texas motor vehicle record information we have marked. However, we note that the requestor has a right of access to one of his client's Texas motor vehicle record information included in Exhibit D. *See id.* § 552.023.

Section 552.136 of the Government Code 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. The department must withhold the insurance policy number we have marked under section 552.136.

In summary, to the extent that the information in Exhibit C is held by the department as an agent of the grand jury, it is in the grand jury's constructive possession and is not subject to the Act. However, if Exhibit C is not in the grand jury's constructive possession, the department may only release the medical records in Exhibit C in accordance with the Medical Practice Act. The department must withhold the marked CHRI under section 411.083 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 552.101. The department must withhold the information we have marked under common law privacy in conjunction with section 552.101. The department must withhold the Texas motor vehicle record information we have marked pursuant to section 552.130. The department must withhold the insurance policy number we have marked pursuant to section 552.136. 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

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

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,



Kara A. Batey
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KAB/mcf

Ref: ID# 278103

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. William T. Jones, Jr.
Grady, Schneider, Newman, L.L.P.
801 Congress, 4th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

(w/o enclosures)