



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 11, 2007

Ms. Sharon Alexander
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Transportation
125 East 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2007-13278

Dear Mr. Alexander:

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# 291444.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to the requestor's client and medical transportation services the requestor's client is provided through the department. 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.¹

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 other statutes make confidential. You argue that Exhibit B is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 12.003 of the Human Resources Code. Federal and state statutes prohibit the disclosure of information concerning a state plan for medical assistance, except for a purpose

¹We 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.

directly connected with the administration of the plan. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 1396a(a)(7); Hum. Res. Code §§ 12.003, 21.012; Open Records Decision Nos. 584 (1991), 166 (1977). Section 12.003 of the Human Resources Code provides in relevant part:

(a) Except for purposes directly connected with the administration of the [Texas Department of Human Services'] assistance programs, it is an offense for a person to solicit, disclose, receive, or make use of, or to authorize, knowingly permit, participate in, or acquiesce in the use of the names of, or any information concerning, persons applying for or receiving assistance if the information is directly or indirectly derived from the records, papers, files, or communications of the department or acquired by employees of the [Department of Human Services] in the performance of their official duties.

Hum. Res. Code § 12.003(a).² In Open Records Decision No. 584 (1991), this office concluded that “[t]he inclusion of the words ‘or any information’ juxtaposed with the prohibition on disclosure of the names of the [Department of Human Services] clients clearly expresses a legislative intent to encompass the broadest range of individual client information, and not merely the clients’ names and addresses.” ORD 584 at 3. Consequently, it is the specific information pertaining to individual clients, and not merely the clients’ identities, that is made confidential under section 12.003. *See also* 42 U.S.C. § 1396a(a)(7) (state plan for medical assistance must provide safeguards that restrict use or disclosure of information concerning applicants and recipients to purposes directly connected with administration of plan); 42 C.F.R. §§ 431.300 *et seq.*; Hum. Res. Code § 21.012(a) (requiring provision of safeguards that restrict use or disclosure of information concerning applicants for or recipients of assistance programs to purposes directly connected with administration of programs); Open Records Decision No. 166. Further, section 21.012(b) provides that a governmental body other than the Health and Human Services Commission that holds client information must provide safeguards restricting the use or disclosure of information concerning applicants for or recipients of assistance programs to purposes directly connected with administration of the assistance programs. *See* Hum. Res. Code § 21.012(b).

You state that the department administers services to Medicaid clients through the Medical Transportation Program, and that Exhibit B relates to this program. We understand that Medicaid is a medical assistance program administered by the Health and Human Services Commission. You indicate that Exhibit B contains individual client information, and that the disclosure of this information would not be a release for purposes directly connected with

²We note that the former Texas Department of Human Services (“DHS”) ceased operations on September 1, 2004, and that the Texas Health and Human Services Commission now administers the Medicaid program formerly administered by DHS. *See* Texas Department of Human Services website at <http://www.dhs.state.tx.us>; *see also* Health and Human Services Commission website at <http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us>; Act of June 2, 2003, 78th Leg., R.S., ch. 198, 2003 Tex. Gen. Laws 611.

the administration of the assistance program. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we agree that Exhibit B is confidential under section 12.003 of the Human Resources Code and it must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code as information made confidential by law.

The requestor asserts that she has a special right of access to the requested information pursuant to Chapter 161, Subchapter M of the Health and Safety Code. Section 161.202 of the Health and Safety Code governs requests for medical and mental health records by a person's authorized representative "for use in supporting an application for disability benefits or other benefits or assistance the [person] may be entitled to receive based on that [person's] disability [.]" Health & Safety Code § 161.202. Section 161.203 provides that a "health care provider or health care facility" that receives such a request "*shall provide* to the requestor a medical or mental health record requested under section 161.202 not later than the 30th day after the date on which the provider or facility receives the request." *Id.* § 161.203 (emphasis added). The department, however, states that Chapter 161 of the Health and Safety Code does not apply to the requested documents. Upon review, we agree that Chapter 161 does not apply to the information at issue because it does not consist of medical or mental health records. Thus, the requestor does not have a right of access to the requested information and it may not 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,



Paige Savoie
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PS/ma

Ref: ID# 291444

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Mary Ellen Felps
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(w/o enclosures)