



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 30, 2010

Ms. Patricia Fleming
Assistant General Counsel
TDCJ - Office of the General Counsel
P.O. Box 4004
Huntsville, Texas 77342-4004

OR2010-14930

Dear Ms. Fleming:

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# 395350.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to the requestor, a former inmate. You state some of the responsive information has been released. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.134 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note a portion of the submitted information, which we have marked, is not responsive to the instant request because it does not pertain to the requestor. The department need not release nonresponsive information in response to this request, and this ruling will not address that 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."¹ Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information made confidential by statute, such as the Medical Practice Act ("MPA"), subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code, which governs release of medical records. *See* Occ. Code § 151.001. Section 159.002 of the MPA provides, in relevant in part:

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

(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(b)-(c). This office has determined in governing access to a specific subset of information, the MPA prevails over the more general provisions of the Act, such as section 552.134 of the Government Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 598 (1991). This office has concluded 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). Information subject to the MPA includes both medical records and information obtained from those medical records. *See id.* We note section 159.001 of the MPA defines "patient" as a person who consults with or is seen by a physician to receive medical care. *See* Occ. Code § 159.001(3).

Medical records must be released on receipt of signed, written consent, provided 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 id.* §§ 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). Upon review, we find a portion of the submitted information, which we have marked, consists of medical records. Accordingly, these marked medical records may only be released in accordance with the MPA.

You raise section 552.134 of the Government Code as an exception to disclosure of the remaining information. Section 552.134 relates to information about inmates of the department and provides in relevant part:

(a) Except as provided by Subsection (b) or by Section 552.029, information obtained or maintained by the [department] is excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021 if it is information about an inmate who is confined in a facility operated by or under a contract with the department.

Gov't Code § 552.134(a). You state the remaining responsive information relates to a former inmate of a facility operated by the department. You also state the exceptions in section 552.029 are not applicable in this instance. Based on your representations and our review, we agree section 552.134 of the Government Code is applicable to the remaining responsive information. We note section 552.023 of the Government Code gives a person or that person's authorized representative a "special right of access, beyond the right of the

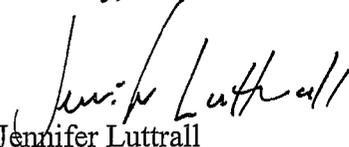
general public, to information held by a governmental body that relates to the person and that is protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect that person's privacy interests." *Id.* § 552.023. However, section 552.134 not only protects the inmate's privacy interest, but also protects the interests of the governmental body. As such, the requestor does not have a special right of access to this information under section 552.023. *See id.* § 552.023(b) (governmental body may assert provisions of Act or other law that are not intended to protect person's privacy interests to withhold information to which requestor may otherwise have a special right of access). Accordingly, the department must withhold the remaining responsive information under section 552.134 of the Government Code.

In summary, the information we have marked may only be released in accordance with the MPA. The department must withhold the remaining responsive information under section 552.134 of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,


Jennifer Luttrall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JL/dls

Ref: ID# 395380

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)