



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

January 30, 2012

Mr. James Mu  
Assistant General Counsel  
Texas Department of Criminal Justice  
Office of the General Counsel  
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Mr. John C West  
General Counsel  
Texas Department of Criminal Justice  
Office of the Inspector General  
4616 West Howard Lane, Suite 250  
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OR2012-01522

Dear Mr. Mu and Mr. West:

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# 443781.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received two requests for information pertaining to the death of a named inmate, including 1) the death certificate; 2) autopsy report; 3) personal belongings; 4) burial information; 5) investigation reports; 6) official documentation concerning the named inmate's incarceration; and 7) any and all information pertaining to an investigation into the named inmate's death. The department's Office of the General Counsel (the "OGC") and its Office of the Inspector General (the "OIG") have submitted separate briefs, as well as separate sets of responsive documents that each seeks to withhold from disclosure. The OGC states it has provided, or will provide, some of its responsive information to the requestor, and the OIG states it will provide some of its responsive information to the requestor with certain addresses, telephone numbers,

social security numbers, and personal family information redacted pursuant to the previous determination issued to the department in Open Records Letter No. 2005-01067 (2005) and section 552.147 of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> The OGC claims the inmate records it has submitted are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.134 of the Government Code, while the OIG claims the investigation records it has submitted are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, 552.108, and 552.134 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exceptions 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. Section 552.101 encompasses information other statutes make confidential, such as section 611.002 of the Health and Safety Code. Section 611.002(a) provides “[c]ommunications between a patient and a professional, and records of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient that are created or maintained by a professional, are confidential.” Health & Safety Code § 611.002(a). Sections 611.004 and 611.0045 provide for access to mental health records only by certain individuals. *See* Open Records Decision No. 565 (1990). These sections permit disclosure of mental health records to a patient, a person authorized to act on the patient’s behalf, or a person who has the written consent of the patient. Health & Safety Code §§ 611.004, .0045. Access to mental health records is governed by the provisions of sections 611.004 and 611.0045, rather than the Act. Open Records Decision Nos. 598, 451 at 4 (1986). The OGC’s inmate records and the OIG’s investigation records contain mental health records. We have marked information in the OGC’s and OIG’s documents that is confidential under section 611.002 of the Health and Safety Code. However, the requestor may be the authorized representative of the person whose mental health records are at issue. Thus, the requestor may have a right of access to the marked information. *See* Health & Safety Code §§ 611.004, .0045. Therefore, the OGC and OIG may release the mental health records we have marked only in accordance with sections 611.004 and 611.0045 of the Health and Safety Code.

Section 552.101 also encompasses the Medical Practice Act (the “MPA”), subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code. *See* Occ. Code §§ 151.001-167.202. Section 159.002 of the MPA provides, in part:

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<sup>1</sup>Open Records Letter No. 2005-01067 authorizes the department to withhold the present and former home addresses and telephone numbers, social security numbers, and family member information of its current or former employees under section 552.117(a)(3) of the Government Code, regardless of whether the current or former employee complies with section 552.1175 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting a decision under the Act. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (listing elements of first type of previous determination under section 552.301(a) of the Government Code). Further, section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person’s social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.147(b).

(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). Information 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 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). This office has also determined 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).

The OGC's remaining inmate records and the OIG's remaining investigation records include medical records protected by the MPA. We have marked the information that constitutes medical records subject to the MPA. We note, however, this information pertains to a deceased individual, and the requestor is the deceased individual's mother. Medical records pertaining to a deceased patient may only be released upon the signed consent of the deceased's personal representative. See Occ. Code § 159.005(a)(5). The consent must specify (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. *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); ORD 565 at 7. We note in governing access to a specific subset of information, the MPA prevails over the more general provisions of the Act. Open Records Decision Nos. 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exceptions to disclosure under the Act). Accordingly, the marked medical records may be released only in accordance with the MPA. See ORD 598.

The OGC claims its remaining inmate information, and the OIG claims its remaining investigation information, is excepted under section 552.134(a) of the Government Code, which relates to inmates of the department and provides:

Except as provided by Subsection (b) or by Section 552.029 [of the Government Code], information obtained or maintained by the [department] is excepted from [required public disclosure] 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). Section 552.134 is explicitly made subject to section 552.029, which provides, in relevant part:

[n]otwithstanding [s]ection . . . 552.134, the following information about an inmate who is confined in a facility operated by or under a contract with the [department] is subject to required disclosure under Section 552.021:

. . .

(8) basic information regarding the death of an inmate in custody, an incident involving the use of force, or an alleged crime involving the inmate.

*Id.* § 552.029(8). Upon review of the remaining inmate and investigation records, we conclude section 552.134(a) is generally applicable to this information. We note, however, some of the OGC's and the OIG's remaining records pertain to the named inmate's death in custody and alleged crimes involving the named inmate. Therefore, with the exception of basic information, which must be released, the OGC and OIG must withhold the remaining information under section 552.134 of the Government Code. Basic information includes the time and place of the incident, names of inmates and department officials directly involved, a brief narrative of the incident, a brief description of any injuries sustained, and information regarding criminal charges or disciplinary actions filed as a result of the incident.<sup>2</sup>

In summary, the marked mental health records may be released only in accordance with sections 611.004 and 611.0045 of the Health and Safety Code and the marked medical records may be released only in accordance with the MPA. With the exception of basic information, the OGC and OIG must withhold the remaining information under section 552.134 of the Government Code.

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<sup>2</sup>As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the OIG's remaining arguments against disclosure, except to note that basic information under section 552.029(8) corresponds to basic front-page information under section 552.108(c) of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.108(c); *Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177, 186-88 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e.*

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](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,



Michelle R. Garza  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MRG/em

Ref: ID# 443781

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)