



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 2, 2013

Mr. R. Brooks Moore
Managing Counsel, Governance
Office of General Counsel
The Texas A&M University System
301 Tarrow Street, Sixth Floor
College Station, Texas 77840-7896

OR2013-11241

Dear Mr. Moore:

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# 492231.

West Texas A&M University (the "university") received a request for information used as the basis of the university's action against the requestor. You indicate you have redacted information pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"), section 1232g of title 20 of the United States Code.¹ You claim 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.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." See Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. Section 51.971 of the Education Code provides in relevant part the following:

¹The United States Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office (the "DOE") has informed this office that FERPA does not permit state and local educational authorities to disclose to this office, without parental consent, unredacted, personally identifiable information contained in education records for the purpose of our review in the open records ruling process under the Act. The DOE has determined that FERPA determinations must be made by the educational authority in possession of the education records. We have posted a copy of the letter from the DOE to this office on the Attorney General's website: <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/20060725usdoe.pdf>.

(a) In this section:

(1) "Compliance program" means a process to assess and ensure compliance by the officers and employees of an institution of higher education with applicable laws, rules, regulations, and policies, including matters of:

(A) ethics and standards of conduct;

(B) financial reporting;

(C) internal accounting controls; or

(D) auditing.

(2) "Institution of higher education" has the meaning assigned by Section 61.003.

...

(c) The following are confidential:

(1) information that directly or indirectly reveals the identity of an individual who made a report to the compliance program office of an institution of higher education, sought guidance from the office, or participated in an investigation conducted under the compliance program; and

(2) information that directly or indirectly reveals the identity of an individual as a person who is alleged to have or may have planned, initiated, or participated in activities that are the subject of a report made to the compliance program office of an institution of higher education if, after completing an investigation, the office determines the report to be unsubstantiated or without merit.

(d) Subsection (c) does not apply to information related to an individual who consents to disclosure of the information.

Educ. Code § 51.971(a), (c)-(d). We understand the university is an institution of higher education for purposes of section 61.003 of the Education Code. *See id.* § 51.971(a)(2). You state the submitted information pertains to allegations of policy and standard of conduct violations reported to and investigated by university administrators who are part of the university's compliance program. Based on your representations, we find this information relates to an investigation conducted under the university's compliance program. *See id.* § 51.971(a)(1).

We understand the submitted information consists of a completed compliance investigation that concluded in a determination the complaint was unsubstantiated or without merit. You state releasing the information you have marked would directly or indirectly reveal the identity of the complainants and those individuals participating in a compliance program investigation. We understand none of these individuals have consented to release of their information. Upon review, we agree release of the information we have marked would directly or indirectly identify individuals as complainants or participants in the compliance program investigation. *See id.* § 51.971(c)(1). Thus, the university must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 51.971(c)(1) of the Education Code. However, none of the remaining information you seek to withhold identifies an individual making a report to, seeking guidance from, or participating in a compliance program investigation for purposes of section 51.971 of the Education Code. Consequently, you have failed to show how any of the remaining information is confidential under section 51.971 of the Education Code, and it may not be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis. As you raise no further exceptions to disclosure, the university must release the remaining information.²

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Kristi L. Wilkins
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KLW/bhf

²We note the information being released in this instance includes information that may be confidential with respect to the general public. Therefore, if the university receives another request for this information from a different requestor, the university must again seek a ruling from this office.

Ref: ID# 492231

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)