OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL · STATE OF TEXAS
JOHN CORNYN

December 21, 2001

Mr. John Olson
Olson & Olson
333 Clay Street, Suite 3485
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2001-6053

Dear Mr. Olson:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 156579.

The City of Tomball (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for nine categories of information related to two named employees of the city's police department. You claim that the employees' medically-related information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We assume that the city has released the remainder of the information responsive to the request. If you have not, you must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.021, .301, .302; Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000). We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You first claim that some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 in conjunction with chapter 159 of the Occupations Code ("Medical Practice Act" or the "MPA"). Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. Section 159.002 of the MPA provides:

> (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.

The MPA governs access to medical records. Open Records Decision No. 565 at 7 (1990). The MPA requires that any subsequent release of medical records be consistent with the purposes for which a governmental body obtained the records. Open Records Decision No. 598 (1991). Moreover, information that is subject to the MPA includes both medical records and information obtained from those medical records. *See* Occ. Code § 159.002(a), (b), (c); Open Records Decision No. 598 (1991). We have marked the medical information that you may release only in accordance with the MPA.

You also claim that some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 in conjunction with section 1701.306 of the Occupations Code. Section 1701.306 provides, in relevant part, as follows:

> (a) The commission may not issue a license to a person as an officer or county jailer unless the person is examined by:
>
> > (1) a licensed psychologist or by a psychiatrist who declares in writing that the person is in satisfactory psychological and emotional health to serve as the type of officer for which a license is sought; and
> >
> > (2) a licensed physician who declares in writing that the person does not show any trace of drug dependency or illegal drug use after a physical examination, blood test, or other medical test.
>
> (b) An agency hiring a person for whom a license as an officer or county jailer is sought shall select the examining physician and the examining psychologist or psychiatrist. The agency shall prepare a report of each declaration required by Subsection (a) and shall maintain a copy of the report on file in a format readily accessible to the commission. *A declaration is not public information.*

Occ. Code § 1701.306. The submitted information contains declarations of medical condition and of psychological and emotional health, which are both made confidential by section 1701.306 of the Occupations Code. We have marked the information that must be withheld pursuant to section 1701.306 of the Occupations Code. With the exception of the information we have marked, you must release the requested information.

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).

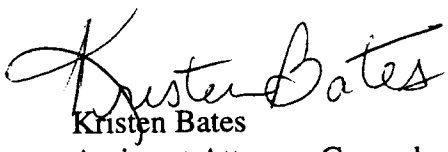
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, 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 Department of Public 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 Texas Building and Procurement Commission 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,



Kristen Bates
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KAB/seg

Ref: ID# 156579

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Richard D. Gatewood
1431 Graham Drive #222
Tomball, Texas 77375
(w/o enclosures)