



July 22, 2002

Ms. Tina Plummer
Open Records Coordinator
Texas Department of Mental Health Mental Retardation
P.O. Box 12668
Austin, Texas 78711-2668

OR2002-3993

Dear Ms. Plummer:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 166004.

The Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation (the “department”) received a request for “any and all records, including: ledgers; burial charts; lists of all patients buried in the [Austin State Hospital (“ASH”)] cemetery, including patient identifying numbers and grave marker numbers; the total number of patients buried in the ASH cemetery; chronological and racial origins” and information about a particular former patient at ASH.¹ 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 representative sample of information.²

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” This exception encompasses information that another statute makes confidential. The department raises section 552.101

¹We note that ASH was formerly known as the State Lunatic Asylum. In referring to the facility, we use its current designation.

²We 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.

in conjunction with section 576.005 of the Health and Safety Code. Section 576.005 provides that “[r]ecords of a mental health facility that directly or indirectly identify a present, former, or proposed patient are confidential unless disclosure is permitted by other state law.” You represent to this office that the requested information constitutes records of ASH, which is a mental health facility, and that these records identify former patients of the facility. You do not inform us of any other state law, nor are we aware of any other law, that would permit the disclosure of these records to this requestor. Based on our review of the submitted information, we agree that Exhibits A, B, D, E, F, G, and H and portions of Exhibit C identify or tend to identify former patients and are therefore confidential under section 576.005 of the Health and Safety Code. We note, however, that Exhibit C consists primarily of general information about business affairs of the hospital that does not identify or tend to identify any current or former patient. Accordingly, under section 552.101 of the Government Code, the department must withhold as confidential by law Exhibits A, B, and D through H in their entirety and those portions of Exhibit C that we have marked as identifying or tending to identify former patients. As our ruling on this issue is dispositive, we need not address your arguments regarding section 611.002 of the Health and Safety Code.

You request a previous determination for this type of information, but we decline to issue such a previous determination at this time. Accordingly, this letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us and 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.

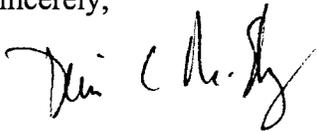
The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

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. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. 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,



Denis C. McElroy
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DCM/seg

Ref: ID# 166004

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Marlene Cobb Kenady
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Austin, Texas 78729
(w/o enclosures)