



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 5, 2004

Mr. James L. Hall
Assistant General Counsel
Office of the General Counsel
P.O. Box 4004
Huntsville, Texas 78711-2548

OR2004-3642

Dear Mr. Hall:

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# 200807.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for information related to an "investigation involving an officer stabbing at Ellis Unit in 1998-99 by [an inmate]." You state that some responsive information has been released to the requestor. You claim that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.117 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You assert that portions of the submitted information constitute medical records that are subject to the Medical Practice Act (the "MPA"), subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code. The MPA provides that "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." Occ. Code § 159.002(b). This office has concluded that 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). In addition, information that is subject to the MPA also includes information that was obtained from medical records. *See id.* § 159.002(a), (b), (c); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 598 (1991). Section 159.002(c) also requires that any subsequent release of medical records be consistent with the purposes for which the governmental body obtained the records. *See*

Open Records Decision No. 565 at 7 (1990). We have marked the medical records that are subject to the MPA. *See* Occ. Code § 159.005(a)(5), (b); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 546 (1990) (finding that because hospital treatment is routinely conducted under supervision of physicians, documents relating to diagnosis and treatment during hospital stay would constitute protected MPA records). The department may only disclose this information in accordance with the access provisions of the MPA. Absent the applicability of an MPA access provision, the department must withhold the information we have marked pursuant to the MPA.

You assert that the remaining submitted information is excepted from public disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Section 552.108(a)(2) excepts from disclosure information concerning an investigation that concluded in a result other than conviction or deferred adjudication. A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(2) must demonstrate that the requested information relates to a criminal investigation that has concluded in a final result other than a conviction or deferred adjudication. You inform us that the records at issue pertain to a case that concluded in a result other than conviction or deferred adjudication. Therefore, we agree that section 552.108(a)(2) is applicable to the remaining submitted information.

However, section 552.108 does not except basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). We believe such basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle Publishing Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, with the exception of the basic front page offense and arrest information, you may withhold the remaining submitted information from disclosure based on section 552.108(a)(2). We note that the department has the discretion to release all or part of the remaining information that is not otherwise confidential by law. Gov't Code § 552.007.

In summary, absent the applicability of an MPA access provision, the department must withhold the information we have marked pursuant to the MPA. With the exception of basic information which must be released, the department may withhold the remaining submitted information under section 552.108(a)(2).

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 Dep't of Pub. 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,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/jh

Ref: ID# 200807

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Angi Bruss
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(w/o enclosures)