



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

April 19, 2005

Ms. Rachel Luna
Thomas Hudson & Brustkern
3305 Northland Drive, Suite 301
Austin, Texas 78731

OR2005-03368

Dear Ms. Luna

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 222325.

The Montgomery County Hospital District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for all documents pertaining to disciplinary action of a named individual. You state that you have released some of the requested information. You claim that some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.102 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.102 excepts from disclosure "information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy." Gov't Code § 552.102(a). In *Hubert v. Harte-Hanks Texas Newspapers*, 652 S.W.2d 546 (Tex. App.—Austin 1983, writ ref'd n.r.e.), the court ruled that the test to be applied to information claimed to be protected under section 552.102 is the same as the test formulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* for information claimed to be protected under the doctrine of common law privacy as incorporated by section 552.101 of the Public Information Act (the "Act"). See *Industrial Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 683-85 (Tex. 1976). Accordingly, we will consider your section 552.101 and section 552.102 claims together.

For information to be protected from public disclosure by the common law right of privacy under section 552.101, the information must meet the criteria set out in *Industrial*

Foundation. In *Industrial Foundation*, the Texas Supreme Court stated that information is excepted from disclosure if (1) the information contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the release of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) the information is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Id.* at 685. The type of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* included information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. *Id.* at 683. This office has found that the following types of information are excepted from required public disclosure under common law privacy: some kinds of medical information or information indicating disabilities or specific illnesses, *see* Open Records Decision Nos. 470 (1987) (illness from severe emotional and job-related stress), 455 (1987) (prescription drugs, illnesses, operations, and physical handicaps).

In this instance, most of the submitted information relates to the workplace conduct of a former employee of the district. As this office has often noted, the public has a legitimate interest in information that relates to the workplace conduct of public officials and employees. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 562 at 10 (1990) (personnel file information does not involve most intimate aspects of human affairs, but in fact touches on matters of legitimate public concern), 542 at 5 (1990) (information in public employee's resume not protected by constitutional or common law privacy under statutory predecessors to Gov't Code §§ 552.101 and 552.102), 470 at 4 (1987) (public employee's job performance does not generally constitute his or her private affairs), 444 at 3 (1986) (public has obvious interest in information concerning qualifications and performance of governmental employees), 405 at 2 (1983) (manner in which public employee performed his or her job cannot be said to be of minimal public interest), 400 at 5 (1983) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.102 is "very narrow" and protects information only if release would lead to clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy). We have marked the submitted information that the district must withhold under sections 552.101 and 552.102 in conjunction with common law privacy. However, none of the remaining submitted information may be withheld under sections 552.101 and 552.102 in conjunction with common law privacy.

Some of the submitted information may be subject to section 552.117 of the Government Code. Section 552.117(a)(1) excepts from public disclosure the present and former home addresses and telephone numbers, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body who request that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024. Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(1). Whether a particular piece of information is protected by section 552.117 must be determined at the time the request is received by the governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). Therefore, pursuant to section 552.117(a)(1), the district must withhold the marked information if the employee at issue elected under section 552.024, prior to the district's receipt of this request, to keep that information confidential. The district may not withhold this information under section 552.117(a)(1) if the employee did not make a timely election.

In summary, the district must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 in conjunction with common law privacy. We have marked the information the district must withhold under section 552.117, if that exception applies. The remaining information must be released

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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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).

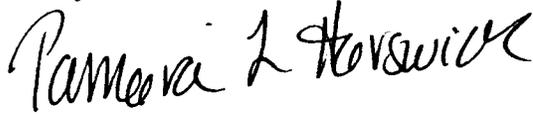
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tamara L. Harswick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tamara L. Harswick
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

TLH/sdk

Ref: ID# 222325

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Amy Currie
c/o Rachel Luna
Thomas Hudson & Brustkern
3305 Northland Drive, Suite 301
Austin, Texas 78731
(w/o enclosures)