ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 18, 2006

Mr. Robert D. Simpson
Assistant General Counsel
Texas State Board of Medical Examiners
P. O. Box 2018
Austin, Texas 78768-2018

OR2006-00593

Dear Mr. Simpson:

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# 240537.

The Texas State Board of Medical Examiners (the "board") received a request for information relating to a named physician, including records pertaining to complaints and disciplinary actions. You state that the board has provided the requestor with a copy of the public verification/physician profile information, including any disciplinary action, and other information the board believes is not excepted from required public disclosure.[1] You claim, however, that certain additional 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]

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[1]We note that the Texas Medical Practice Act, subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code, requires the board to make public certain information concerning physicians licensed in this state. *See* Occ. Code §§ 154.004 (requiring board to make public on request summary of any previous disciplinary board order against specific physician licensed in Texas), .006 (requiring board's compilation of physician profiles in format easily available to the public).

[2]We 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.

Section 552.101 excepts from required public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses information that another statute makes confidential. You contend that the submitted complaint and disciplinary files are confidential under section 164.007(c) of the Occupations Code. Section 164.007(c) provides as follows:

> (c) Each complaint, adverse report, investigation file, other investigation report, and other investigative information in the possession of or received or gathered by the board or its employees or agents relating to a license holder, an application for license, or a criminal investigation or proceeding is privileged and confidential and is not subject to discovery, subpoena, or other means of legal compulsion for release to anyone other than the board or its employees or agents involved in discipline of a license holder. For purposes of this subsection, investigative information includes information relating to the identity of, and a report made by, a physician performing or supervising compliance monitoring for the board.

Occ. Code § 164.007(c). You explain that section 154.056 of the Occupations Code requires the board to investigate complaints. You inform us that the submitted documents consist of investigative information that is in the possession of or was received or gathered by the board in connection with complaints and disciplinary matters. You assert that section 164.007(c) is applicable to the complaint and disciplinary files. Having considered your arguments, we conclude that the submitted complaint and disciplinary files are confidential under section 164.007(c) of the Occupations Code and are therefore excepted from required disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.[3]

You also ask this office to issue a previous determination permitting the board to withhold this category of information without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office. 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; 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.

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[3]As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address your remaining claim.

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); *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 Office of the Attorney General 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,

Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/er

Ref: ID# 240537

Enc. Submitted documents

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