



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 16, 2006

Mr. Robert D. Simpson
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Medical Board
P. O. Box 2018, MC-251
Austin, Texas 78768-2018

OR2006-09304

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# 257159.

The Texas Medical Board (the "board") received a request for all information pertaining to a named physician. You state that the board is providing the requestor with some of the requested information, including a copy of the public verification and physician profile information, as well as some information pertaining to disciplinary action.¹ However, you claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code 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 information is confidential under section 164.007(c) of the Occupations Code, which 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

¹We 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).

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 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 as well as during an investigation of the named physician's application for a license. You explain that section 154.056 of the Occupations Code requires the board to investigate complaints. Furthermore, we note that section 164.007(c) is applicable to investigatory records compiled by the board during an investigation of an application for a license. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we conclude that the submitted information is generally confidential under section 164.007(c) of the Occupations Code.

We note, however, that the requestor here is seeking this information in connection with the named physician's application for privileges at the Laredo Medical Center. Section 164.007(f) of the Occupations Code provides that "[i]nvestigative information in the possession of the board . . . relating to discipline of a license holder may be disclosed to . . . a medical peer review committee reviewing an application for privileges[.]" *Id.* § 164.007(f)(2). You do not otherwise inform us that the board is authorized to release such information to this requestor. *See id.* § 164.007(d), (f)-(h). As such, if the requestor is seeking this information for a medical peer review committee reviewing the named physician's application for privileges, then, pursuant to section 164.007(f), the board may release the submitted investigative information relating to discipline of the named physician but must withhold the remaining submitted information under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 164.007(c). However, if section 164.007(f) is inapplicable in this instance, then the board must withhold all of the submitted information under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 164.007(c).

Lastly, you also ask this office to issue a previous determination that would permit the board to withhold all investigative information in a licensure file under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 164.007(c) of the Occupations Code. *See Gov't Code* § 552.301(a); Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001). We decline to issue 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 ten 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 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 ten calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Rapfogel
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RBR/eb

Ref: ID# 257159

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Adriana R. Cortes
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(w/o enclosures)