



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 28, 2007

Mr. Brett Norbraten
Open Records Attorney
Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services
P.O. Box 149030 - MC-W-615
Austin, Texas 78714-9030

OR2007-02348

Dear Mr. Norbraten:

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# 272630.

The Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (the "department") received a request for the medical records of four residents of the Abilene State School for the past five years. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. Section 595.001 of the Health and Safety Code provides that "[r]ecords of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a person that are maintained in connection with the performance of a program or activity relating to mental retardation are confidential and may be disclosed only for the purposes and under the

¹We 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.

circumstances authorized under Sections 595.003 and 595.004.” Health & Safety Code § 595.001. You state that the submitted documents are “records of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a person that are maintained in connection with the [Abilene] State School’s provision of mental retardation services to the person.” Although the requestor is an employee of the Abilene State School, you assert the requestor has not demonstrated that he has a right of access to the submitted records under section 595.003 or 595.004 of the Health and Safety Code. Having considered your representations and reviewed the submitted records, we agree that the submitted information is confidential under section 595.001 of the Health and Safety Code, and the department must withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code as information made confidential by law.²

You also ask this office to issue a previous determination permitting the department to withhold information pertaining to state school clients under Chapter 595 of the Health and Safety Code. 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. *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).

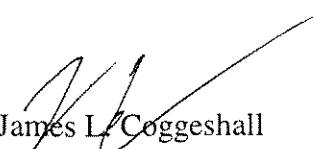
²As our ruling on this issue is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

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,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/krl

Ref: ID# 272630

Enc. Submitted documents

c: William C. Rainey, M.D.
6318 Hardwick Road
Abilene, Texas 79606
(w/o enclosures)