



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 8, 2009

Mr. Erik Brown
Assistant General Counsel
TDCJ - Office of the General Counsel
P.O. Box 13084
Austin, Texas 78711-3084

Mr. John C. West
General Counsel
Office of the Inspector General
Texas Department of Criminal Justice
4616 Howard Lane, Suite 250
Austin, Texas 78728

OR2009-17330

Dear Mr. Brown and Mr. West:

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# 363636.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for all information pertaining to a specified incident involving a named inmate, all grievances filed by that named inmate, and certain information pertaining to that named inmate. The department's Office of the General Counsel (the "OGC") and Office of the Inspector General (the "OIG") have submitted separate briefs and separate documents that each seeks to withhold from disclosure. The OGC states that it will release any of the requested information for which it does not seek an exception. The OGC claims the information it has submitted is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.134 of the Government Code. The OIG states it has released some of the requested information with redactions pursuant to the previous determination issued to the department in Open Records

Letter No. 2005-01067 (2005)¹ and section 552.147 of the Government Code.² The OIG claims the information it has submitted is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.134 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions claimed and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses information other statutes make confidential, such as the Medical Practice Act (the "MPA"), subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code. See Occ. Code § 151.001. Section 159.002 of the MPA provides, in part:

(a) A communication between a physician and a patient, relative to or in connection with any professional services as a physician to the patient, is confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.

(b) 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.

(c) A person who receives information from a confidential communication or record as described by this chapter, other than a person listed in Section 159.004 who is acting on the patient's behalf, may not disclose the information except to the extent that disclosure is consistent with the authorized purposes for which the information was first obtained.

Id. § 159.002(a)-(c). Information subject to the MPA includes both medical records and information obtained from those medical records. See *id.* §§ 159.002, .004; Open Records Decision No. 598 (1991). This office has concluded 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). This office has also determined when a file is created as the result of a hospital stay, all of the documents in the file that relate to diagnosis and treatment constitute either physician-patient communications or records of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or

¹Open Records Letter No. 2005-01067 serves as a previous determination that the present and former home addresses and telephone numbers, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former employees of the department, regardless of whether the current or former employee complies with section 552.1175 of the Government Code, are excepted from disclosure under section 552.117(a)(3) of the Government Code.

²Section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act.

treatment of a patient by a physician that are created or maintained by a physician. *See* Open Records Decision No. 546 (1990). The OGC and the OIG both claim the submitted documents include medical records protected by the MPA. We have marked the information that constitutes medical records subject to the MPA. The OGC and OIG may only release these records in accordance with the MPA.

Next, we address section 552.134 of the Government Code, which encompasses information relating to inmates of the department and states that:

[e]xcept as provided by Subsection (b) or by Section 552.029 [of the Government Code], information obtained or maintained by the [department] is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information about an inmate who is confined in a facility operated by or under a contract with the department.

Gov't Code § 552.134(a). The OGC and OIG claim section 552.134 for the remaining information. Upon review, we agree the remaining information is information about an individual confined as an inmate in a facility operated by the department and it, therefore, subject to section 552.134. We further find the exceptions in section 552.029 are not applicable in this instance. The OGC and OIG must withhold the remaining information under section 552.134 of the Government Code.³

In summary, the marked medical records may only be released in accordance with the MPA. The department must withhold the remaining information under section 552.134 of the Government Code.

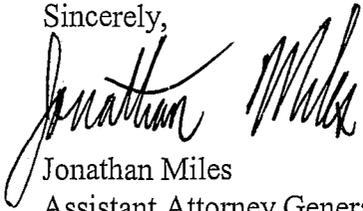
This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public

³As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument.

information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jonathan Miles".

Jonathan Miles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JM/cc

Ref: ID# 363636

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)