



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

May 2, 2011

Mr. Jason L. Mathis  
Cowles & Thompson  
901 Main Street, Suite 3900  
Dallas, Texas 75202-3793

OR2011-05977

Dear Mr. Mathis:

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# 415974.

The Town of Addison (the "town"), which you represent, received a request for documentation for reported on the job injuries of town employees for a specified time period. You claim some of the requested 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 disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 ("HIPAA"), 42 U.S.C. §§ 1320d-1320d-8. At the direction of Congress, the Secretary of Health and Human Services ("HHS") promulgated regulations setting privacy standards for medical records, which HHS issued as the Federal Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information. *See* Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, 42 U.S.C. § 1320d-2 (Supp. IV 1998) (historical & statutory note); Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information, 45 C.F.R. pts. 160, 164 ("Privacy Rule"); *see also* Attorney General Opinion JC-0508 at 2 (2002). These standards govern the releasability of protected health information by a covered entity. *See* 45 C.F.R. pts. 160, 164. Under these standards, a covered entity may not use or disclose protected health information, except as provided by parts 160 and 164 of the Code of Federal Regulations. 45 C.F.R. § 164.502(a).

This office addressed the interplay of the Privacy Rule and the Act in Open Records Decision No. 681 (2004). In that decision, we noted section 164.512 of title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations provides that a covered entity may use or disclose protected health information to the extent such use or disclosure is required by law and the use or disclosure complies with, and is limited to, the relevant requirements of such law. *See* 45 C.F.R. § 164.512(a)(1). We further noted the Act “is a mandate in Texas law that compels Texas governmental bodies to disclose information to the public.” *See* ORD 681 at 8; *see also* Gov’t Code §§ 552.002, .003, .021. We, therefore, held that the disclosures under the Act come within section 164.512(a). Consequently, the Privacy Rule does not make information confidential for the purpose of section 552.101 of the Government Code. *See Abbott v. Tex. Dep’t of Mental Health & Mental Retardation*, 212 S.W.3d 648 (Tex. App.—Austin 2006, no pet.); ORD 681 at 9; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 478 (1987) (as general rule, statutory confidentiality requires express language making information confidential). Because the Privacy Rule does not make information that is subject to disclosure under the Act confidential, the town may not withhold any portion of the submitted information on this basis.

You also claim section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 773.091 of the Health and Safety Code, which provides in part:

(b) Records of the identity, evaluation or treatment of a patient by emergency medical services personnel or by a physician providing medical supervision that are created by the emergency medical services personnel or physician or maintained by an emergency medical services provider are confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.

(c) Any person who receives information from confidential communications or records as described by this chapter, other than a person listed in Section 773.092 who is acting on the survivor’s behalf, may not disclose the information except to the extent that disclosure is consistent with the authorized purposes for which the information was obtained.

Health & Safety Code § 773.091(b)-(c). Section 773.091 is applicable to records of the provision of emergency medical services (“EMS”). *See* Open Records Decision No. 632 (1995). Although you contend the submitted information is confidential under section 773.091, you have not demonstrated the submitted information was created by EMS personnel or a physician providing medical supervision or that the information is maintained by an EMS provider. *See* Health & Safety Code § 773.091(b); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 649 at 3 (1996) (language of confidentiality provision controls scope of its protection). We, therefore, conclude the town may not withhold the any of the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 773.091 of the Health and Safety Code.

We note some of the remaining information may be subject to section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> Section 552.117(a)(1) excepts from disclosure the home addresses and telephone numbers, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body who timely request that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(1). Whether a particular piece of information is protected by section 552.117(a)(1) must be determined at the time the request for it is made. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). The town may only withhold information under section 552.117(a)(1) if the employee at issue elected confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date on which the request for this information was made. Therefore, the town must withhold the information we have marked pursuant to section 552.117(a)(1) if the employee concerned timely elected to keep the marked information confidential under section 552.024. If the employee did not make a timely request for confidentiality, the information at issue may not be withheld under section 552.117.

In summary, to the extent the employee timely elected confidentiality under section 552.024 of the Government Code, the town must withhold the information we marked under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.

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](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 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,



Jonathan Miles  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JM/em

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<sup>1</sup>The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

Mr. Jason L. Mathis - Page 4

Ref: ID# 415974

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)