



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 1, 2014

Ms. Halfreda Anderson Nelson
Public Information Officer
Senior Assistant General Counsel
Dallas Area Rapid Transit
P.O. Box 660163
Dallas, Texas 75266-0163

OR2014-17491

Dear Ms. Nelson:

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# 538123 (ORR# 10938).

Dallas Area Rapid Transit ("DART") received a request for the requestor's personnel file. You state DART has released some of the requested information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.122 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions 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 made confidential by statute, such as the Medical Practice Act ("MPA"), subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code, which governs release of medical records. *See* Occ. Code §§ 151.001-168.202. Section 159.002 of the MPA provides, in relevant 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. We have further found when a file is created as a result of a hospital stay, all the documents in the file referring to diagnosis and treatment constitute physician-patient communications or “[r]ecords of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by a physician that are created or maintained by a physician.” Open Records Decision No. 546 (1990). 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). We note the MPA does not apply to optometrists. *See* Occ. Code § 151.052(a)(2).

Upon review, we find some of the submitted information, which we have marked, constitutes records of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by a physician that were created or are maintained by a physician and information obtained from a patient's medical records. Accordingly, DART must withhold the marked medical records under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the MPA. However, we find you have not demonstrated how any portion of the remaining information consists of medical records for purposes of the MPA, and DART may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.101 on that basis.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 258.102 of the Occupations Code. Section 258.102 provides in pertinent part as follows:

(a) The following information is privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this subchapter:

- (1) a communication between a dentist and a patient that relates to a professional service provided by the dentist; and
- (2) a dental record.

Id. § 258.102(a). A “dental record” means dental information about a patient that is created or maintained by a dentist and relates to the history or treatment of the patient. *See id.* § 258.101(1). Upon review, we find the information we marked constitutes dental records

DART must withhold under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 258.102 of the Occupations Code.

Section 552.122(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[a] test item developed by an educational institution that is funded wholly or in part by state revenue[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.122(a). In Open Records Decision No. 626 (1994), this office determined the term “test item” in section 552.122 includes “any standard means by which an individual’s or group’s knowledge or ability in a particular area is evaluated.” ORD 626 at 6. The question of whether specific information falls within the scope of section 552.122(a) must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *Id.* at 7. Traditionally, this office has applied section 552.122 where release of “test items” might compromise the effectiveness of future examinations. *See* Open Records Decision No. 118 (1976). *See generally* ORD 626 at 4-5. Section 552.122 also protects the answers to test questions when the answers might reveal the questions themselves. *See* Attorney General Opinion JM-640 at 3 (1987).

You seek to withhold the questions and answers submitted as Exhibit C under section 552.122 of the Government Code. You assert the questions test the knowledge and abilities of employees in a particular area. Based on your representations and our review, we agree the submitted questions are “test items” under section 552.122(b) of the Government Code. Furthermore, we find release of the answers to the questions would reveal the questions themselves. Therefore, DART may withhold the questions and answers under section 552.122(b) of the Government Code.

In summary, DART must withhold the medical records we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the MPA and the dental records we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 258.102 of the Occupations Code. DART may withhold Exhibit C under section 552.122 of the Government Code. DART must release the remaining information to this requestor.¹

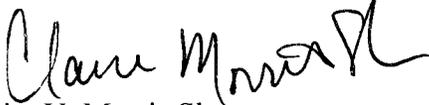
This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, or call the Office of the Attorney General’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for

¹We note the requestor has a right of access to some of the information being released in this instance. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.023(a) (governmental body may not deny access to person to whom information relates or person’s agent on ground that information is considered confidential by privacy principles); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individuals request information concerning themselves).

providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/som

Ref: ID# 538123

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)