



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 8, 2016

Mr. Jonathan Miles
Open Records Attorney
Texas Health and Human Services Commission
P.O. Box 13247
Austin, Texas 78711

OR2016-17766

Dear Mr. Miles:

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# 621859.

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (the "commission") received a request for (1) all documents pertaining to the Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP") case involving a named individual; (2) all Medicaid and SNAP eligibility files during a specified time; and (3) a specified Office of the Inspector General (the "OIG") investigation file. You state you released some information. You claim portions of the submitted information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.107 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. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes, including section 531.1021 of the Government Code, which provides, in relevant part:

(g) All information and materials subpoenaed or compiled by the [OIG] in connection with an audit or investigation or by the office of the attorney general in connection with a Medicaid fraud investigation are confidential and not subject to disclosure under [the Act], and not subject to disclosure,

discovery, subpoena, or other means of legal compulsion for their release to anyone other than the [OIG] or the attorney general or their employees or agents involved in the audit or investigation conducted by the [OIG] or the attorney general, except that this information may be disclosed to the state auditor's office, law enforcement agencies, and other entities as permitted by other law.

(h) A person who receives information under Subsection (g) may disclose the information only in accordance with Subsection (g) and in a manner that is consistent with the authorized purpose for which the person first received the information.

Id. § 531.1021(g), (h). You state the information you marked and indicated was compiled by the OIG in connection with an investigation concerning alleged Medicaid and other health and human services fraud and abuse. Based on your representation and our review, we find the commission must withhold the information you marked and indicated under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 531.1021(g) of the Government Code.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. *See id.* § 552.107(1). When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate that the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made "to facilitate the rendition of professional legal services" to the client governmental body. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in a capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a *confidential* communication, *id.* 503(b)(1), meaning it was "not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those: (A) to whom disclosure is made to further the rendition of professional legal services to the client; or (B) reasonably necessary to transmit the communication." *Id.* 503(a)(5). Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the *intent* of the

parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, orig. proceeding). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain that the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

You state the information you marked consists of communications involving attorneys for the commission and commission employees. You state these communications were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the commission. You state these communications were intended to be, and have remained, confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the information you marked. Accordingly, the commission may withhold the information you marked under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.

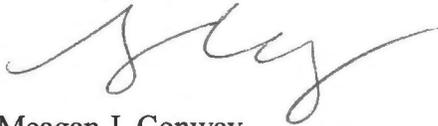
In summary, the commission must withhold the information you marked and indicated under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 531.1021(g) of the Government Code. The commission may withhold the information you marked under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. The commission must release the remaining information.¹

Finally, you ask this office to issue a previous determination permitting the commission to withhold OIG investigatory records under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 531.1021(g) of the Government Code without seeking a ruling from this office. *See Gov't Code § 552.301(a)* (allowing governmental body to withhold information subject to previous determination); Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (listing elements of second type of previous determination under section 552.301(a) of the Government 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.

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). Thus, if the commission receives another request for the same information from a different requestor, the commission must again seek a decision from this office.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Meagan J. Conway', written in a cursive style.

Meagan J. Conway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MJC/akg

Ref: ID# 621859

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)