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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 19, 2016

Mr. William Buechler
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3660 Stoneridge Road, Suite D-101
Austin, Texas 78746

OR2016-28030

Dear Mr. Buechler:

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# 641471.

The George West Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for a named employee's personnel file. The district states it has provided some of the requested information to the requestor, but claims the submitted information is either not subject to the Act or excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.102 of the Government Code. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

The Act is applicable only to "public information." See Gov't Code §§ 552.002, .021. Section 552.002(a) reads as follows:

(a) In this chapter, "public information" means information that is written, produced, collected, assembled, or maintained under a law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business:

- (1) by a governmental body;
- (2) for a governmental body and the governmental body:

(A) owns the information;

(B) has a right of access to the information; or

(C) spends or contributes public money for the purpose of writing, producing, collecting, assembling, or maintaining the information; or

(3) by an individual officer or employee of a governmental body in the officer's or employee's official capacity and the information pertains to official business of the governmental body.

Id. § 552.002(a). Section 552.002(a-1) also provides the following:

Information is in connection with the transaction of official business if the information is created by, transmitted to, received by, or maintained by an officer or employee of the governmental body in the officer's or employee's official capacity, or a person or entity performing official business or a governmental function on behalf of a governmental body, and pertains to official business of the governmental body.

Id. § 552.002(a-1). Thus, virtually all of the information in a governmental body's physical possession constitutes public information and, thus, is subject to the Act. *Id.* § 552.002(a)(1); *see* Open Records Decision Nos. 549 at 4 (1990), 514 at 1-2 (1988). The Act also encompasses information that a governmental body does not physically possess, if the information is collected, assembled, or maintained for the governmental body, and the governmental body owns the information or has a right of access to it. Gov't Code § 552.002(a)(2); *see* Open Records Decision No. 462 at 4 (1987). Further, information that is written, produced, collected, assembled, or maintained by an individual officer or employee of a governmental body in the officer's or employee's official capacity may be subject to disclosure under the Act if the information pertains to official business of the governmental body. Gov't Code § 552.002(a)(3). Information is "in connection with the transaction of official business" if the information is created by, transmitted to, received by, or maintained by a person or entity performing official business or a government function on behalf of a governmental body and the information pertains to official business of the governmental body. *See id.* § 552.002(a-1). Moreover, section 552.001 of the Act provides it is the policy of this state that each person is entitled, unless otherwise expressly provided by law, at all times to complete information about the affairs of government and the official acts of public officials and employees. *See id.* § 552.001(a).

The district asserts some of the submitted information is not public information. However, based upon the representations of the district and our review, we find the district maintains this information in connection with the transaction of its official business. Thus, the

information constitutes “public information” as defined by section 552.002(a). Accordingly, the submitted information is subject to the Act in its entirety and the district must release it, unless it falls within an exception to public disclosure under the Act. *See id.* §§ 552.006, .021..301, .302. Therefore, we will address the district’s arguments against the release of this information under the Act.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code exempts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” *Id.* § 552.101. This section encompasses the Medical Practice Act (the “MPA”), subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code. *See Occ. Code* §§ 151.001-168.202. Section 159.002 of the MPA provides in relevant part the following:

(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 records. *See id.* §§ 159.002, .004. 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 at 3-4 (1988), 370 at 2 (1983), 343 at 1 (1982). Upon review, we find the information that the district has marked under the MPA constitutes a medical record. Accordingly, the district must withhold the information it has marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the MPA.¹

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 21.355 of the Education Code. Section 21.355(a) provides “[a] document evaluating the performance of a teacher or administrator is confidential.” *Educ. Code* § 21.355(a). Additionally, the Third Court of Appeals has concluded a written reprimand constitutes an evaluation for purposes of

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address the other argument of the district to withhold this information.

section 21.355 as it “reflects the principal’s judgment regarding [a teacher’s] actions, gives corrective direction, and provides for further review.” *Abbott v. N. E. Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 212 S.W.3d 364 (Tex. App.—Austin 2006, no pet.). This office has interpreted section 21.355 to apply to any document that evaluates, as that term is commonly understood, the performance of a teacher or administrator. *See* Open Records Decision No. 643 at 3 (1996). We also determined a “teacher” for purposes of section 21.355 means a person who (1) is required to and does in fact hold a teaching certificate under subchapter B of chapter 21 of the Education Code or a school district teaching permit under section 21.055 and (2) is engaged in the process of teaching, as that term is commonly defined, at the time of the evaluation. *See id.* at 4. Further, we determined “administrator” in section 21.355 means a person who is required to and does in fact hold an administrator’s certificate under subchapter B of chapter 21 of the Education Code and is performing the functions of an administrator, as that term is commonly defined, at the time of the evaluation. *Id.*

The district asserts some of the remaining information evaluates the performance of the named employee who held the appropriate certificates for purpose of section 21.355 at the time of the evaluations. Upon review, we find some of the remaining information is confidential under section 21.355. Therefore, the district must withhold this information, which we have marked, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 21.355 of the Education Code.² However, the district has not established any of the remaining information consists of “[a] document evaluating the performance of a teacher or administrator” as contemplated by section 21.355. Accordingly, we conclude the district has not established the remaining information is confidential under section 21.355, and the district may not withhold it under section 552.101 on that ground.

Section 552.102(b) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “a transcript from an institution of higher education maintained in the personnel file of a professional public school employee[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.102(b). This exception further provides, however, that “the degree obtained or the curriculum on a transcript in the personnel file of the employee” are not excepted from disclosure. *Id.* The district must withhold the submitted educational transcripts, which we have marked, under section 552.102(b) of the Government Code, except for the information that reveals the employees’ name, the degree obtained, and the courses taken. *See* Open Records Decision No. 526 (1989) (addressing statutory predecessor). However, the remaining information that the district seeks to withhold does not consist of a transcript from an institution of higher education. Therefore, the district may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.102(b).

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information that is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) not of

²As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address the other argument of the district to withhold this information.

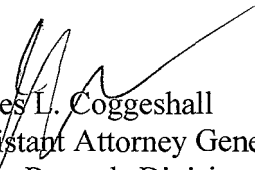
legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both prongs of this test must be satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. Types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court are delineated in *Industrial Foundation*. *Id.* at 683. However, this office has also found the public has a legitimate interest in information relating to employees of governmental bodies and their employment qualifications and job performance. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 470 at 4 (1987) (public has legitimate interest in job qualifications and performance of public employees), 405 at 2-3 (1983) (public has interest in manner in which public employee performs job). Upon review, we find none of the remaining information satisfies the standard articulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation*. Accordingly, the remaining information is not confidential under common-law privacy, and the district may not withhold it under section 552.101 on that ground.

To conclude, the district must withhold the following: (1) the information it has marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the MPA; (2) the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 21.355 of the Education Code; and (3) with the exception of the information that reveals the employee's name, the degree obtained, and the courses taken, which the district must release, the information we have marked under section 552.102(b) of the Government Code. The district must release the remaining information.

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

Sincerely,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/bw

Ref: ID# 641471

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)