



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 19, 2019

Mr. Jonathan Miles
Open Records Attorney
Texas Health and Human Services
P.O. Box 13247
Austin, Texas 78711-3247

OR2019-04547

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# 751709 (OR-20180907-16309).

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (the "commission") received a request for information pertaining to specified facilities with a specified license, including pending licenses.¹ You state you are releasing most of the requested information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.² 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. This section encompasses the Texas Abortion Facility Reporting and Licensing Act, chapter 245 of the Health and Safety Code. Section 245.011(d) provides:

¹As you have not submitted a copy of the request for information, we take our description from your brief.

²You acknowledge the commission did not comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting a ruling from this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b), (e). Nonetheless, because the exception you claim can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness, we will consider its applicability to the submitted information. *See id.* §§ 552.007, .302, .352.

Except as provided by Section 245.023, all information and records held by the [Department of State Health Services (the “department”)³] under [chapter 245 of the Health and Safety Code] are confidential and are not open records for the purposes of [the Act]. That information may not be released or made public on subpoena or otherwise, except that release may be made:

- (1) for statistical purposes, but only if a person, patient, physician performing an abortion, or abortion facility is not identified;
- (2) with the consent of each person, patient, physician, and abortion facility identified in the information released;
- (3) to medical personnel, appropriate state agencies, or county and district courts to enforce this chapter; or
- (4) to appropriate state licensing boards to enforce state licensing laws.

Health & Safety Code § 245.011(d). Section 245.023 of the Health and Safety Code provides in part:

(a) The department on request shall make the following information available to the public:

- (1) the status of the license of any abortion facility;
- (2) the date of the last inspection of the facility, any violation discovered during that inspection that would pose a health risk to a patient at the facility, any challenge raised by the facility to the allegation that there was a violation, and any corrective action that is acceptable to the department and that is being undertaken by the facility with respect to the violation; and
- (3) an administrative or civil penalty imposed against the facility or a physician who provides services at the facility, professional discipline imposed against a physician who provides services at the facility, and any criminal conviction of the facility or a physician who provides services at the facility that is relevant to services provided at the facility.

...

³We note the Eighty-Fourth Legislature passed Senate Bill 200, which as of September 1, 2017, transferred the licensing and regulation of abortion facilities from the department to the commission.

(e) This section does not authorize the release of the name, address, or phone number of any employee or patient of an abortion facility or of a physician who provides services at an abortion facility.

Id. § 245.023(a), (e). You state the submitted information, which pertains to abortion facilities, is governed by chapter 245 of the Health and Safety Code. You assert the current request does not fall within the four types of disclosure permitted under section 245.011(d). Accordingly, with the exception of the information subject to section 245.023(a), which must be released, the commission must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 245.011 of the Health and Safety Code.

Finally, you request that this office issue a “previous determination” that would permit the commission in the future to withhold from disclosure information relating to facilities with abortion licenses without the need of requesting a ruling from us about whether such information can be withheld from disclosure. We decline to issue such a previous determination at this time. Accordingly, 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,



Paige Lay
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PS/som

Ref: ID# 751709

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)