



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

April 23, 2020

Mr. Donnie McGilbra
Assistant County Attorney
El Paso County
500 East San Antonio, Room 503
El Paso, Texas 79901

OR2020-11583

Dear Ms. McGilbra:

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# 823870 (ORR# OP-20-0118).

The El Paso Office of the Medical Examiner (the "medical examiner's office") received a request for information pertaining to the requestor's client. The medical examiner's office claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exception 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 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 Exhibit C constitutes medical records. Accordingly, the medical examiner's office must withhold Exhibit C under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the MPA.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 773.091 of the Health and Safety Code, which provides, in part, the following:

(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.

...

(g) The privilege of confidentiality under this section does not extend to information regarding the presence, nature of injury or illness, age, sex, occupation, and city of residence of a patient who is receiving emergency medical services.

Health & Safety Code § 773.091(b), (g). The information at issue consists of records of the identity, evaluation, or treatment of a patient made and maintained by emergency medical services personnel. Thus, section 773.091 is applicable to this information. Therefore, with the exception of the information subject to section 773.091(g) of the Health and Safety Code, which is not confidential under section 773.091, the medical examiner's office must withhold Exhibit B under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 773.091(b) of the Health and Safety Code.

In summary, the medical examiner's office must withhold Exhibit C under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the MPA. With the exception of the information subject to section 773.091(g) of the Health and Safety Code, which the medical examiner's office must release, the medical examiner's office must withhold Exhibit B under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 773.091(b) of the Health and Safety Code.

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 <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/rm

Ref: ID# 823870

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)