ELLEN F. ROSENBLUM
ATTORNEY GENERAL

FREDERICK M. BOSS
DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Justice Building
1162 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301-4096
Telephone: (503) 378-4400

January 23, 2020

VIA EMAIL ONLY: wcfbrookings@live.com

Suzie Wright
590 Southbank Chetco River Rd.
Brookings, OR 97415

Re: Petition for Public Records Disclosure Order
Department of Human Services
DOJ File No.: 100001-GA0009-20

Dear Mrs. Wright:

This letter is the Attorney General's response to your petition for disclosure under the Oregon Public Records Law, ORS 192.311 to 192.478. Your petition asks the Attorney General to order the Department of Human Services (DHS) to disclose records relating to a particular Adult Protective Services investigation. For the reasons that follow, we respectfully deny your petition.

The Public Records Law confers the right to inspect public records in Oregon, unless such records are exempt under ORS 192.338, 192.345, or 192.355. ORS 192.314(1). The law is a disclosure law, and exemptions from disclosure must be express. Any person denied the right to inspect or to receive a copy of a public record of a state agency may petition the Attorney General to review the record and determine if it may be withheld. ORS 192.411(1). The agency carries the burden to sustain its actions. ORS 192.411(1).

In light of your petition we contacted Chelsey Herrman, DHS Lead Public Records Coordinator. She informed us that the records you seek relate to an investigation of alleged elder neglect. She explained DHS' position that ORS 124.090 makes those records confidential and exempt from disclosure because they were compiled under Oregon's Elder Abuse Reporting Statutes, ORS 124.050 to 124.095. Specifically, ORS 124.090(1) states:

///

> Notwithstanding the provisions of ORS 192.311 to 192.478, the names of the public or private official or any other person who made the complaint, the witnesses and the elderly persons, and the reports and records compiled under the provisions of ORS 124.050 to 124.095, are confidential and are not accessible for public inspection.

And records made confidential under state law are expressly exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Law. *See* ORS 192.355(9)(a). Although there are several exceptions that permit DHS to disclose otherwise confidential elder abuse records in limited circumstances, Ms. Herrmann explained DHS' position that none of those exceptions apply to your request. *See* ORS 124.090(2)(a)-(g).[1]

After discussing the particulars of the investigative records with Ms. Herrmann and reviewing the report of investigation, we find that they were compiled under Oregon's Elder Abuse Reporting Statutes. They are therefore confidential under ORS 124.090 and expressly exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Law. *See* ORS 192.355(9)(a). And because it does not appear to us that any of the exceptions to ORS 124.090 expressly permit DHS to disclose the investigative records to you, we must respectfully deny your petition.

Sincerely,

Frederick M. Boss
Deputy Attorney General

FMB:pjn/DM10060336
c via email only: Chelsey Herrmann (DHS)

[1] The exceptions to the general rule of confidentiality, ORS 124.090(2)(a)-(g), permit DHS to disclose elder abuse records only to: law enforcement agencies; agencies that license or certify residential facilities or their employees; public and private nonprofit agencies providing protective services to the elderly person; the Long Term Care Ombudsman; the agency that licensed or certified the person alleged to have abused an elderly person; a court pursuant to a court order; and to an administrative law judge in proceedings relating to protective services or when necessary to investigate, prevent or treat elder abuse. Confidential information made available to any of these agencies or individuals remains subject to the confidentiality provisions of ORS 124.090(1). ORS 124.090(3).