



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 15, 2016

Ms. Cynthia Tynan
Senior Attorney & Public Information Coordinator
The University of Texas System
201 West Seventh Street, Suite 600
Austin, Texas 78701-2901

OR2016-25419

Dear Ms. Tynan:

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# 634236 (OGC# 171794).

The University of Texas at Austin (the "university") received a request for information related to the university's athletic department staff and specified contracts or written agreements between the university's athletic department and third parties. You state the university has released some information to the requestor. Although you take no position with respect to the public availability of the submitted information, you state release of this information may implicate the proprietary interests of Strategic Marketing Affiliates, LLC ("Strategic"). Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified Strategic of the request for information and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the submitted information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in the Act in certain circumstances). We have received comments from Strategic. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.104(a) of the Government Code exempts from disclosure "information that, if released, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder." Gov't Code § 552.104(a). In considering whether a private third party may assert this exception, the supreme court reasoned because section 552.305(a) of the Government Code includes section 552.104 as an example of an exception that involves a third party's property interest, a private third party may invoke this exception. *Boeing Co. v. Paxton*, 466 S.W.3d 831, 839 (Tex. 2015). The "test under section 552.104 is whether knowing another bidder's [or competitor's

information] would be an advantage, not whether it would be a decisive advantage.” *Id.* at 841. Strategic states it has competitors. In addition, Strategic states release of the information at issue would give advantage to its competitors and seeks to withhold the terms of the contract. For many years, this office concluded the terms of a contract and especially the pricing of a winning bidder are public and generally not excepted from disclosure. Gov’t Code § 552.022(a)(3) (contract involving receipt or expenditure of public funds expressly made public); Open Records Decision Nos. 541 at 8 (1990) (public has interest in knowing terms of contract with state agency), 514 (1988) (public has interest in knowing prices charged by government contractors), 494 (1988) (requiring balancing of public interest in disclosure with competitive injury to company). *See generally* Freedom of Information Act Guide & Privacy Act Overview, 219 (2000) (federal cases applying analogous Freedom of Information Act reasoning that disclosure of prices charged government is a cost of doing business with government). However, now, pursuant to *Boeing*, section 552.104 is not limited to only ongoing competitive situations, and a third party need only show release of its competitively sensitive information would give an advantage to a competitor even after a contract is executed. *Boeing*, 466 S.W.3d at 839. After review of the information at issue and consideration of the arguments, we find Strategic has established the release of the information at issue would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, we conclude the university may withhold the submitted information we have marked under section 552.104(a) of Government Code.¹ The university 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,



Ian Lancaster
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

IML/akg

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address Strategic’s remaining arguments against disclosure.

Ref: ID# 634236

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party
(w/o enclosures)