



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 10, 2017

Mr. Andrew Wipke
Assistant District Attorney
Lubbock County District Attorney's Office
904 Broadway
Lubbock, Texas 79401

OR2017-00695

Dear Mr. Wipke:

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# 641197 (ORR.033).

The Lubbock County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney's office") received a request for amendments to a specified awarded contract. Although you take no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, you state release of some of this information may implicate the proprietary interests of G. Boren Services, Inc. ("GBSI"). Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation demonstrating, you notified the third party of the request for information and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the information at issue 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 GBSI. We have reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note some of the submitted information is not responsive to the present request because it is not any of the information requested by the requestor. This ruling does not address the public availability of the non-responsive information and the district attorney's office need not release it in response to this request.

Section 552.104(a) of the Government Code excepts 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 (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 842. GBSI states it has competitors. In addition, GBSI states release of the information at issue would cause substantial competitive harm to GBSI because competitors would be able to undercut GBSI’s future bids. GBSI seeks to withhold the terms of the contract amendments. 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 832, 841. After review of the information at issue and consideration of the arguments, we find GBSI has established the release of the information at issue would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, we conclude the district attorney’s office may withhold the responsive information under section 552.104(a) of the Government Code.¹

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

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address GBSI’s remaining argument against disclosure of this information.

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

Sincerely,


April Philley
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

AP/sdk

Ref: ID# 641197

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

1 Third Party
(w/o enclosures)