



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 3, 2017

Mr. Shawn R. Venables  
Senior Contracts Administrator  
Office of the Harris County Purchasing Agent  
1001 Preston, Suite 670  
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2017-22538

Dear Mr. Venables:

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# 678069.

The Office of the Harris County Purchasing Agent (the "county") received a request for a specified contract. Although you take no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, you state release of this information may implicate the proprietary interests of Gateway Foundation – Texas ("Gateway"). Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified Gateway 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 Gateway. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

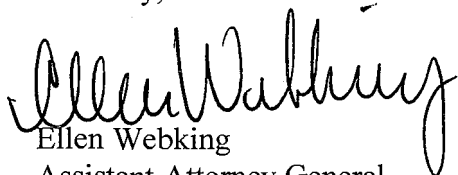
Section 552.104(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information that, if released, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder." Gov't Code § 552.104(a). A private third party may invoke this exception. *Boeing Co. v. Paxton*, 466 S.W.3d 831 (Tex. 2015). The "test under section 552.104 is whether knowing another bidder's [or competitor's information] would be an advantage, not whether it would be a decisive advantage." *Id.* At 841. Gateway states it has competitors. In addition, Gateway states release of some of its information would provide a competitive advantage to its competitors

and seeks to withhold a portion of the contract at issue. 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 831, 139. After review of the information at issue and consideration of the arguments, we find Gateway has established the release of the information at issue would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, we conclude the county may withhold the information we have indicated under section 552.104(a) of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> The county 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](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,



Ellen Webking  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

EW/tdw

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<sup>1</sup>As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

Ref: ID# 678069

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party  
(w/o enclosures)