



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 4, 2019

Mr. Blake C. Billings
Assistant General Counsel
Office of the General Counsel
Texas Tech University System
P.O. Box 42021
Lubbock, Texas 79409-2021

OR2019-03135

Dear Mr. Billings:

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# 746632 (Reference No. 2018-OR-409).

Texas Tech University (the "university") received a request for a specified university rule. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.104 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.111 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "[a]n interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency[.]" Gov't Code § 552.111. This exception encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of section 552.111 is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990).

In Open Records Decision No. 615, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice,

recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* ORD 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351, 364 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995).

Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *See Arlington Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 37 S.W.3d 152 (Tex. App.—Austin 2001, no pet.); *see* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

You state the information at issue consists of an internal document representing the university's opinions and recommendations regarding policymaking matters of the university. Based upon your representations and our review, we find portions of the information at issue consist of advice, opinions, or recommendations on the policymaking matters of the university. Accordingly, the university may withhold the information we marked under section 552.111 of the Government Code on the basis of the deliberative process privilege.¹ However, we find the remaining information at issue is either general administrative information that does not relate to policymaking or information that is purely factual in nature. Thus, we conclude you failed to demonstrate the remaining information at issue constitutes internal communications containing advice, recommendations, or opinions reflecting the policymaking processes of the university. Therefore, the university may not withhold the remaining information under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

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). 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." *Boeing Co. v. Paxton*, 466 S.W.3d 831, 841 (Tex. 2015). After review of the information at issue and consideration of the arguments, we find you failed to establish the release of the information at issue would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Therefore, we conclude the university may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.104(a) of the Government Code.

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

In summary, the university may withhold the information we marked under section 552.111 of the Government Code. 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,



James M. Graham
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JMG/som

Ref: ID# 746632

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)