



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 26, 2019

Ms. Tiffany N. Evans
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2019-08347

Dear Ms. Evans:

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# 756287 (GC Nos. 25708, 25724, and 25750).

The City of Houston (the "city") received three requests from three different requestors for information pertaining to a specified request for proposals. You state the city will release some information. Although you take no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, you state release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of Universal Protection Service, LP d/b/a Allied Universal Security Services ("Allied"); Andy Frain Services, Inc.; Blue Knight Security, LLC; G4S Secure Solutions, USA Inc. ("G4S"); Norred & Associates; Securitas Security Services USA, Inc.; Strategic Security Corp.; Sunstates Security, LLC; United American Security; U.S. Security Associates, Inc.; and Vets Securing America.¹ Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified these third parties of the request for information and

¹We note, and you acknowledge, the city did not comply with the requirements of section 552.301(e) of the Government Code in providing some of the information at issue. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e). Nonetheless, third-party interests can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness, we will consider whether the submitted information must be withheld under the Act. *See id.* §§ 552.007, .302, .352.

of their 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 Allied and G4S. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

An interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this ruling, we have only received comments from Allied and G4S. Thus, we have no basis to conclude any of the remaining interested third parties have a protected proprietary interest in the submitted information. *See id.* § 552.110(a)-(b); Open Records Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (to prevent disclosure of commercial or financial information, party must show by specific factual evidence, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that release of requested information would cause that party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3. Accordingly, the city may not withhold any of the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest any of the remaining interested third parties may have in the 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). 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 841. Allied states it has competitors. In addition, Allied states release of the information it indicated would allow its competitors to "formulate similar competitive pricing or interfere in a confidential relationship with a uniquely qualified business partner at [Allied's] expense." After review of the information at issue and consideration of the arguments, we find Allied established the release of its information at issue, which we marked, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, we conclude the city may withhold the information we marked under section 552.104(a) of the Government Code.²

G4S claim parts of its information are excepted under section 552.110 of the Government Code, which protects (1) trade secrets, and (2) commercial or financial information, the disclosure of which would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the

²As our ruling on this information is dispositive, we need not address Allied's remaining argument against disclosure of this information.

information was obtained. See Gov't Code § 552.110. Section 552.110(a) protects trade secrets obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision. *Id.* § 552.110(a). The Texas Supreme Court has adopted the definition of trade secret from section 757 of the Restatement of Torts. See *Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 763 (Tex. 1957); see also Open Records Decision No. 552. Section 757 provides that a trade secret is:

any formula, pattern, device or compilation of information which is used in one's business, and which gives him an opportunity to obtain an advantage over competitors who do not know or use it. It may be a formula for a chemical compound, a process of manufacturing, treating or preserving materials, a pattern for a machine or other device, or a list of customers. It differs from other secret information in a business . . . in that it is not simply information as to single or ephemeral events in the conduct of the business A trade secret is a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business [It may] relate to the sale of goods or to other operations in the business, such as a code for determining discounts, rebates or other concessions in a price list or catalogue, or a list of specialized customers, or a method of bookkeeping or other office management.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); see also *Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d at 776. In determining whether particular information constitutes a trade secret, this office considers the Restatement's definition of trade secret as well as the Restatement's list of six trade secret factors.³ RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b. This office must accept a claim that information subject to the Act is excepted as a trade secret if a *prima facie* case for the exception is made and no argument is submitted that rebuts the claim as a matter of law. See ORD 552 at 5. However, we cannot conclude section 552.110(a) is applicable unless it has been shown the information meets the definition of a trade secret and the necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish a trade secret claim. See Open Records Decision No. 402 (1983). We note pricing information pertaining to a particular contract is generally

³The Restatement of Torts lists the following six factors as indicia of whether information constitutes a trade secret:

- (1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company];
- (2) the extent to which it is known by employees and other involved in [the company's] business;
- (3) the extent of measures taken by [the company] to guard the secrecy of the information;
- (4) the value of the information to [the company] and [its] competitors;
- (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing the information;
- (6) the ease or difficulty with which the information could be properly acquired or duplicated by others.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b; see also Open Records Decision Nos. 319 at 2 (1982), 306 at 2 (1982), 255 at 2 (1980).

not a trade secret because it is “simply information as to single or ephemeral events in the conduct of the business,” rather than “a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business.” RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b; *see also Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d at 776; Open Record Decision Nos. 255, 232 (1979), 217 (1978).

Section 552.110(b) protects “[c]ommercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.110(b). This exception to disclosure requires a specific factual or evidentiary showing, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that substantial competitive injury would likely result from release of the information at issue. *Id.*; *see also* ORD 661 at 5-6.

G4S assert portions of its information constitute trade secrets under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. Upon review, we conclude G4S established a *prima facie* case its customer information meets the definition of a trade secret. Accordingly, the city must generally withhold G4S’s customer information under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. However, to the extent any of the customer information G4S seeks to withhold is available on the company’s website, such information is not confidential under section 552.110(a). However, we find G4S failed to establish a *prima facie* case any portion of its remaining information at issue meets the definition of a trade secret. We further find G4S failed to demonstrate the necessary factors to establish a trade secret claim for its remaining information. *See* ORDs 402, 319 at 2 (information relating to organization, personnel, market studies, professional references, qualifications, experience, and pricing not excepted under section 552.110). Therefore, the city may not withhold any of G4S’s remaining information under section 552.110(a).

G4S also contends some of its information is commercial or financial information, the release of which would cause substantial competitive harm to the company. Upon review, we find G4S demonstrated its pricing information constitutes commercial or financial information, the release of which would cause substantial competitive injury. Accordingly, the city must withhold G4S’s pricing information under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. However, we find G4S failed to establish any of the remaining information constitutes commercial or financial information the disclosure of which would cause the company substantial competitive harm. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.110(b). Therefore, the city may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue on this basis.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code provides information relating to a motor vehicle operator’s license, driver’s license, motor vehicle title or registration, or personal identification document issued by an agency of this state or another state or country is

excepted from public release.⁴ *See id.* § 552.130. Accordingly, the city must withhold the motor vehicle record information we marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

Section 552.136(b) of the Government Code provides, “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of [the Act], a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential.” *Id.* § 552.136(b); *see id.* § 552.136(a) (defining “access device”). This office has concluded insurance policy numbers constitute access device numbers for purposes of section 552.136. Accordingly, the city must withhold all insurance policy numbers in the remaining information under section 552.136 of the Government Code.

We note some of the remaining information appears to be protected by copyright. A custodian of public records must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are copyrighted. Open Records Decision No. 180 at 3 (1977). A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.*; *see* Open Records Decision No. 109 (1975). If a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit.

In summary, the city may withhold the information we marked under section 552.104 of the Government Code. To the extent G4S's customer information is not publicly available on its company website, the city must withhold G4S's customer information under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. The city must withhold G4S's pricing information under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. The city must withhold the information we marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code. The city must withhold all insurance policy numbers in the remaining information under section 552.136 of the Government Code. The city must release the remaining information; however, the city may only release any information subject to copyright in accordance with copyright law.

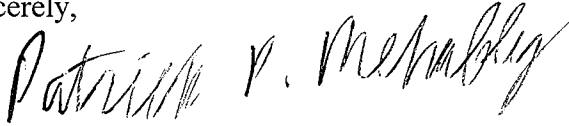
This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

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/>

⁴The Office of the Attorney General will raise mandatory exceptions on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

[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,



Patrick P. Mehaffy
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PPM/jxd

Ref: ID# 756287

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

8 Third Parties
(w/o enclosures)