



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 14, 2019

Ms. Deanne Lin
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

OR2019-12835

Dear Ms. Lin:

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# 765415 (ORR# 19PIA0161).

The Harris County Purchasing Agent (the "county") received a request for specified information submitted by the winning bidder in response to a request for proposals. 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 Vantiv, LLC ("Vantiv").¹ Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified Vantiv 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 reviewed the submitted information.

We note an interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should be withheld from public disclosure. *See* Gov't

¹We note the county did not comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting this decision. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b), (e). Nevertheless, because the interests of third parties can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness, we will consider the submitted arguments for the submitted information. *See id.* §§ 552.007, .302, .352.

Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, we have not received comments from Vantiv explaining why the submitted information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude Vantiv has a protected proprietary interest in the submitted information. *See id.* § 552.110; 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 party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3. Accordingly, the county may not withhold the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest Vantiv may have in the information.

We note some of the submitted 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. The county must release the submitted information; however, any information subject to copyright may only be released 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/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,



Emily Buchanan
Attorney
Open Records Division

EB/be

Ref: ID# 765415

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

1 Third Party
(w/o enclosures)