



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 27, 2019

Ms. Katheryne Ellison
Assistant General Counsel
Houston Independent School District
4400 West 18th Street
Houston, Texas 77092-8501

OR2019-17731

Dear Ms. Ellison:

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# 770470 (File No. C040819).

The Houston Independent School District (the "district") received a request for information pertaining to the district's legal services. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.104 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

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 (Tex. 2015). You state the submitted information relates to a bid for services and the district seeks bids for these services on a recurring basis. Further, you state release of the information at issue would allow competitors to undercut future bids and "diminish the [d]istrict's ability to procure the highest quality goods and services and to negotiate the most competitive contracts." We note the submitted information consists of

¹We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

awarded contracts. 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 it need only be shown release of competitively sensitive information would give an advantage to a competitor even after a contract is executed. *Boeing*, 466 S.W.3d at 831, 839. After review of the submitted information and consideration of the arguments, we find the district has established release of the submitted information would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, we conclude the district may withhold the submitted information under section 552.104(a) of the Government Code.

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,



D. Michelle Case
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DMC/gw

Ref: ID# 770470

c: Requestor