



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 8, 2019

Mr. Renaldo Stowers
Senior Associate General Counsel
University of North Texas System
Mail Account #62048
1155 Union Circle #310907
Denton, Texas 76203

Mr. Aesil Kim
Assistant General Counsel
University of North Texas System
Mail Account #62048
1155 Union Circle #310907
Denton, Texas 76203

OR2019-28237

Dear Mr. Stowers and Mr. Kim:

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# 790182 (UNT Public Information No. 006981).

The University of North Texas (the "university") received a request for a copy of all technology transfer agreements with Chinese corporations. You state you have released some information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.110 of the Government Code. Additionally, you state release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of the following third parties: Changzhou Ruize Microelectronics Co., Ltd.; Chinese Academy of Biomedical Sciences; Digital Train Limited; Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd.; Huazhong Agricultural University College of Plant Science and Technology; NUtch Ventures; Shandong University; South China Agricultural University; and Indiana University Research and Technology Corporation ("Indiana University"). Accordingly, you state and provide documentation showing, you notified these third parties of the request for information and 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) (determining statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure in certain circumstances).* We have received comments from Indiana University. We have

considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Initially, although you argue the submitted information is subject to section 552.110 of the Government Code, we note section 552.110 protects the interests of private parties that provide information to governmental bodies, not the interests of governmental bodies themselves. *See generally* Open Records Decision No. 592 (1991). Accordingly, we do not consider your argument under section 552.110 of the Government Code.

Next, we note 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 letter, we have not received comments from any of the remaining third parties. Thus, we have no basis to conclude any of the remaining third parties 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 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 university may not withhold the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest any of the remaining third parties may have in it.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses section 51.914(a)(1) of the Education Code, which provides as follows:

(a) In order to protect the actual or potential value, the following information is considered confidential and is not subject to disclosure under [the Act], or otherwise:

(1) all information relating to a product, device, or process, the application or use of such a product, device, or process, and all technological and scientific information (including computer programs) developed in whole or in part at a state institution of higher education, regardless of whether patentable or capable of being registered under copyright or trademark laws, that have a potential for being sold, traded, or licensed for a fee[.]

Educ. Code § 51.914(a)(1). As noted in Open Records Decision No. 651 (1997), the legislature is silent as to how this office or a court is to determine whether particular scientific information has "a potential for being sold, traded, or licensed for a fee[.]" ORD

¹ We 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.

651 at 9-10. Furthermore, whether particular scientific information has such a potential is a question of fact that this office is unable to resolve in the opinion process. *See id.* at 10. Thus, this office has stated in considering whether requested information has “a potential for being sold, traded, or licensed for a fee[.]” we will rely on a governmental body’s assertion that the information has this potential. *See id.* However, a governmental body’s determination that information has a potential for being sold, traded, or licensed for a fee is subject to judicial review. *See id.* We note section 51.914 is not applicable to working titles of experiments or other information that does not reveal the details of the research. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 557 at 3 (1990), 497 at 6-7 (1988).* Although Indiana University asserts section 51.914, we find Indiana University has failed to explain, nor can we discern, how the information reveals details about the product at issue or any plans for commercialization. Accordingly, the university may not withhold any portion of the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 51.914 of the Education Code. As no further exceptions to disclosure have been raised, the university must release the submitted 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 <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Kimbell Kesling
Attorney
Open Records Division

KK/eb

Ref: ID# 790182

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

9 Third Parties
(w/o enclosures)