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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 30, 2019

Mr. Fred A. Stormer
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Underwood
P.O. Box 9158
Amarillo, Texas 79105-9158

OR2019-30580

Dear Mr. Stormer:

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# 792711.

The Pampa Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for the district's most recent winning bid for financial and depository services. The district claims some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.136 of the Government Code. Additionally, the district states release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of FirstBank Southwest ("FirstBank"). Accordingly, the district states, and provides documentation showing, it notified FirstBank of the request for information and of the 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 FirstBank. We have reviewed the submitted arguments and the submitted 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). 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. FirstBank states it has competitors. In addition, FirstBank states release of the information at issue would "afford an unfair advantage to other potential bidders" and would place FirstBank at a competitive disadvantage. 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 a third party need only show release of its competitively sensitive information would give an advantage to a competitor even after a contract is executed. *Boeing*, 466 S.W.3d at 841. After review of the information at issue and consideration of the arguments, we find FirstBank has established the release of the information at issue 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.¹

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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/mo

Ref: ID# 792711

c: Requestor

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