



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 17, 2019

Mr. Barry L. Macha  
General Counsel  
Midwestern State University  
3410 Taft Boulevard  
Wichita Falls, Texas 76308-2099

OR2019-35606

Dear Mr. Macha:

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# 802021.

Midwestern State University (the "university") received a request for information related to a specified request for proposals. Although the university takes no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, the university states release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of Trinity Hughes/Sundt., A Joint Venture ("THS"). Accordingly, the university states, and provides documentation showing, it notified THS 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.<sup>1</sup> *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.

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 Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, we have not received comments from THS explaining why the submitted information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude THS has a protected proprietary interest in the submitted information. *See id.* § 552.110; Open Records Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (to prevent

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<sup>1</sup> The university did not comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting a ruling from this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e). Nonetheless, because third-party interests can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness, we will consider whether the submitted information may be released. *See id.* §§ 552.007, .302, .352.

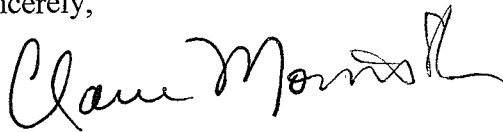
disclosure of commercial or financial information, party must show by specific factual evidence, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that release of requested information would cause that party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3. Accordingly, the university may not withhold the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest THS may have in the information.

We note some of the materials at issue may 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. Thus, the university must release the submitted information; however, any information that is subject to copyright may be released only 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 <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/jxd

Ref: ID# 802021

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party  
(w/o enclosures)