



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 18, 2020

Ms. Sol M. Cortez
Senior Assistant City Attorney
City of El Paso
P.O. Box 1890
El Paso, Texas 79950-1890

OR2020-05082

Dear Ms. Cortez:

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# 812326 (Ref. No. W065665-112119 & City Case No. 19-1044-1455).

The City of El Paso (the "city") received a request for certain information pertaining to a specified request for solicitation. You claim some of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.104 and 552.110 of the Government Code. In addition, you state release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of Accela, Inc. ("Accela"). Accordingly, the city states, and provides documentation showing, it notified Accela 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 considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

The city contends the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.110 of the Government Code. Section 552.110 protects (1) trade secrets obtained from a person and (2) commercial or financial information the disclosure of which would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained. *See Gov't Code* § 552.110(a)-(b). 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 address the city's arguments under section 552.110.

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 Accela explaining why the submitted information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude Accela 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 city may not withhold the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest Accela may have in the 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). 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). While you argue the release of the submitted information could harm Accela by giving an advantage to its competitors, such an interest in protecting the information belongs to the third party and not the city. Therefore, we find the city may not withhold the submitted information under section 552.104(a) of the Government Code. As no other exceptions to disclosure have been raised, the city 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michelle Garza', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Michelle Garza
Attorney
Open Records Division

MRG/gw

Ref: ID# 812326

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

c: Third Party
(w/o enclosures)