



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

November 3, 2020

Mr. Ronny Wall
Senior Associate General Counsel
Texas Tech University System
P.O. Box 42021
Lubbock, Texas 79409-2021

OR2020-27534

Dear Mr. Wall:

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# 851659.

Texas Tech University System (the "system") received a request for information pertaining to two specified contracts. Although the system takes no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, the system states release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of Hill International, Inc. ("Hill International") and Hill & Wilkinson Construction Group, Ltd. d/b/a Hill & Wilkinson General Contractors ("Hill & Wilkinson"). Accordingly, the system states, and provides documentation showing, it 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) (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 received comments from Hill International. We have reviewed the submitted arguments and the submitted information.

Initially, we note 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 Hill & Wilkinson explaining why the submitted information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude Hill & Wilkinson has a protected proprietary interest in the submitted information. *See, e.g., id.* § 552.110

(requiring the provision of specific factual evidence demonstrating the applicability of the exception). Accordingly, the system may not withhold the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest Hill & Wilkinson may have in the information.

Section 552.110(b) states, “[e]xcept as provided by [s]ection 552.0222, information is [excepted from required disclosure] if it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that the information is a trade secret.” *See id.* § 552.110(b). Section 552.110(a) defines a trade secret as all forms and types of information if:

(1) the owner of the trade secret has taken reasonable measures under the circumstances to keep the information secret; and

(2) the information derives independent economic value, actual or potential, from not being generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable through proper means by, another person who can obtain economic value from the disclosure or use of the information.

Id. § 552.110(a). Section 552.110(c) of the Government Code states:

Except as provided by Section 552.0222, commercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained is [excepted from required disclosure].

Id. § 552.110(c). Additionally, we note section 552.0222(b) lists certain types of information to which section 552.110 does not apply. *See id.* § 552.0222(b). Upon review, we find Hill International demonstrated portions of the information at issue constitute commercial or financial information, the release of which would cause substantial competitive harm. Accordingly, the system must withhold the information we marked under section 552.110(c) of the Government Code.¹ However, we find some of the remaining information at issue is subject to section 552.0222(b) and may not be withheld on the basis of section 552.110(c). Additionally, we find Hill International failed to provide specific factual evidence demonstrating the remaining information at issue constitutes commercial or financial information, the release of which would result in substantial competitive harm. Further, we find Hill International failed to provide specific factual evidence demonstrating any portion of the remaining information at issue is a trade secret. Therefore, the system may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue under section 552.110 of the Government Code.

Section 552.1101 of the Government Code provides, in relevant part:

(a) Except as provided by Section 552.0222, information submitted to a governmental body by a vendor, contractor, potential vendor, or potential contractor in response to a request for a bid, proposal, or

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

qualification is excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021 if the vendor, contractor, potential vendor, or potential contractor that the information relates to demonstrates based on specific factual evidence that disclosure of the information would:

(1) reveal an individual approach to:

(A) work;

(B) organizational structure;

(C) staffing;

(D) internal operations;

(E) processes; or

(F) discounts, pricing methodology, pricing per kilowatt hour, cost data, or other pricing information that will be used in future solicitation or bid documents; and

(2) give advantage to a competitor.

Id. § 552.1101(a). Additionally, we note section 552.0222(b) lists certain types of information to which section 552.1101(a) does not apply. *See id.* § 552.0222(b). Upon review, we find some of the remaining information at issue is subject to section 552.0222(b) and may not be withheld on the basis of section 552.1101(a). *See id.* §§ 552.0222(b). Additionally, we find Hill International failed to provide specific factual evidence demonstrating any portion of the rest of the remaining information at issue is subject to section 552.1101(a). Therefore, the system may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue under section 552.1101(a) of the Government Code.

Section 552.131(a) excepts from disclosure only “trade secret[s] of [a] business prospect” and “commercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained.” *Id.* This aspect of section 552.131 is co-extensive with section 552.110 of the Government Code. *See id.* § 552.110(a)-(b). Because we already disposed of Hill International’s claims under section 552.110, the system may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.131(a) of the Government Code.

In summary, the system must withhold the information we marked under section 552.110(c) of the Government Code. The system must release the remaining 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,

Katie Stallcup
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

AKS/jm

Ref: ID# 851659

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

2 Third Parties
(w/o enclosures)