



OFFICE of the ATTORNEY GENERAL  
GREG ABBOTT

July 3, 2003

Ms. Kathleen Spears  
Office for Public Information  
Parkland Health & Hospital System  
5201 Harry Hines Boulevard  
Dallas, Texas 75235

OR2003-4591

Dear Ms. Spears:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 183789.

The Dallas County Hospital District (the "district") received a request for proposals submitted for Request for Proposal No. 4055-03 (the "RFP"). You state that the district received responses from eleven vendors for the RFP. You claim that two of the responsive proposals may be excepted from disclosure under section 552.110 of the Government Code. You make no arguments and take no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under that exception. You provide documentation showing that you have notified GENEX Services, Inc. ("GENEX") and Attenta, Inc. ("Attenta"), two of the third parties whose proprietary interests may be implicated, of the request for information pursuant to section 552.305 of the Government Code. *See Gov't Code § 552.305* (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in Chapter 552 of Government Code in certain circumstances). The district has submitted two of the proposals to this office. We have reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that you have not submitted the other nine proposals in response to the RFP, nor have you indicated you wish to withhold such proposals from disclosure. If you have not released this information, you must release it to the requestor at this time. *See Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302.*

Next, you indicate that the submitted proposals have been marked as confidential. However, information is not confidential under the Public Information Act (the "Act") simply because the party submitting the information anticipates or requests that it be kept confidential. *Industrial Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 677 (Tex. 1976). In other words, a governmental body cannot, through an agreement or contract, overrule or repeal provisions of the Act. Attorney General Opinion JM-672 (1987); Open Records Decision No. 541 at 3 (1990) ("[T]he obligations of a governmental body under [the predecessor to the Act] cannot be compromised simply by its decision to enter into a contract."). Consequently, unless the information at issue falls within an exception to disclosure, it must be released, notwithstanding any agreement specifying otherwise.

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, neither GENEX nor Attenta has submitted to this office their reasons explaining why their information should not be released. Therefore, neither GENEX nor Attenta has provided us with any basis to conclude that they have a protected proprietary interest in any of the submitted information. See Gov't Code § 552.110(b) (to prevent disclosure of commercial or financial information, party must show by specific factual or evidentiary material, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that it actually faces competition and that substantial competitive injury would likely result from disclosure); Open Records Decision Nos. 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3 (1990). Consequently, the district may not withhold the requested information pertaining to GENEX or Attenta under section 552.110.

Certain information contained within the submitted proposals, however, is confidential and must be withheld from disclosure.<sup>1</sup> The submitted information contains e-mail addresses obtained from the public. Section 552.137 makes certain e-mail addresses confidential. Section 552.137 provides:

- (a) An e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body is confidential and not subject to disclosure under this chapter.
- (b) Confidential information described by this section that relates to a member of the public may be disclosed if the member of the public affirmatively consents to its release.

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<sup>1</sup>The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

Gov't Code § 552.137. You do not inform us that a member of the public has affirmatively consented to the release of any e-mail address contained in the submitted materials. The district must, therefore, withhold the e-mail addresses we have marked under section 552.137. We note that section 552.137 does not apply to a business' general e-mail address or a government employee's work e-mail address.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Sarah I. Swanson  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

SIS/lmt

Ref: ID# 183789

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Monica Kloskowski  
Southwest Regional Sales Manager  
Frank Gates  
8777 North Gainey Center Dr., Ste. 171  
Scottsdale, AZ 85258  
(w/o enclosures)