



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 13, 2008

Ms. Leticia D. McGowan
School Attorney
Dallas Independent School District
3700 Ross Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75204-5491

OR2008-11034

Dear Ms. McGowan:

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# 318963.

The Dallas Independent School District (the "district") received a request for "bid proposals from Bid LH203294-Price Agreement for the Purchase and Lease of Computer Equipment." You state that some responsive information has been released to the requestor. Although the district raises no exception to disclosure on its own behalf, you claim that the release of some of the submitted information may affect the proprietary interests of interested third parties. Pursuant to section 552.305 of the Government Code, you state that you notified these third parties of the request and of their right to submit arguments to this office as to why the information should not be released.¹ See Gov't Code § 552.305(d); see also 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 to disclosure under Act in certain circumstances). We have received comments from HP and Prime. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

¹The following third parties were notified pursuant to section 552.305: Hewlett Packard Company ("HP"), Prime Systems/Directron.com ("Prime"), Apple Inc., M&A Technology, Inc., Lakehills Enterprise Technology Solutions, and Dell Inc.

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 requested information relating to it should be withheld from disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, we have received comments only from HP and Prime. None of the remaining third parties have submitted to this office any reasons explaining why their submitted information should not be released. Therefore, these remaining companies have failed to provide us with any basis to conclude that they have protected proprietary interests in any of the submitted information. *See* 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, we conclude that the district may not withhold any portion of the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest the remaining third parties may have in the information.

HP claims that some of its information is subject to section 552.101 of the Government Code, which excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. However, HP has not directed our attention to any law, nor are we aware of any law, that makes the submitted information confidential. *See, e.g.*, Open Records Decision Nos. 600 at 4 (1992) (constitutional privacy), 478 at 2 (1987) (statutory confidentiality), 611 at 1 (1992) (common-law privacy). Therefore, the district may not withhold any of the company's information under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

HP asserts that portions of its information are excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.104 of the Government Code, which excepts from disclosure "information that, if released, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder." Gov't Code § 552.104. Section 552.104, however, is a discretionary exception that protects only the interests of a governmental body, as distinguished from exceptions that are intended to protect the interests of third parties. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 592 (1991) (statutory predecessor to section 552.104 designed to protect interests of a governmental body in a competitive situation, and not interests of private parties submitting information to the government), 522 (1989) (discretionary exceptions in general). As the district does not seek to withhold any information pursuant to this exception, we find that section 552.104 is not applicable to the submitted information. *See* ORD 592 (governmental body may waive section 552.104).

HP and Prime each raise section 552.110 of the Government Code. Section 552.110 protects: (1) trade secrets, 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). A "trade secret"

may consist of any formula, pattern, device or compilation of information which is used in one's business, and which gives [one] an opportunity to obtain an advantage over competitors who do not know or use it. It may be a formula for a chemical compound, a process of manufacturing, treating or preserving materials, a pattern for a machine or other device, or a list of customers. It differs from other secret information in a business in that it is not simply information as to single or ephemeral events in the conduct of the business, as for example the amount or other terms of a secret bid for a contract or the salary of certain employees A trade secret is a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business. Generally it relates to the production of goods, as for example, a machine or formula for the production of an article. It may, however, relate to the sale of goods or to other operations in the business, such as a code for determining discounts, rebates or other concessions in a price list or catalogue, or a list of specialized customers, or a method of bookkeeping or other office management.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 763, 776 (Tex.); Open Records Decision Nos. 552 at 2, 255 (1980), 232 (1979), 217 (1978).

There are six factors to be assessed in determining whether information qualifies as a trade secret:

- (1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company's] business;
- (2) the extent to which it is known by employees and others involved in [the company's] business;
- (3) the extent of measures taken by [the company] to guard the secrecy of the information;
- (4) the value of the information to [the company] and to [its competitors];
- (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing this information; and
- (6) the ease or difficulty with which the information could be properly acquired or duplicated by others.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b; *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 319 (1982), 306 (1982), 255, 232. This office must accept a claim that information

subject to the Act is excepted as a trade secret if a *prima facie* case for exemption is made and no argument is submitted that rebuts the claim as a matter of law. ORD 552. However, we cannot conclude that section 552.110(a) is applicable unless it has been shown that the information meets the definition of a trade secret and the necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish a trade secret claim. Open Records Decision No. 402 (1983).

Section 552.110(b) protects “[c]ommercial 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[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.110(b). This exception to disclosure requires a specific factual or evidentiary showing, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that substantial competitive injury would likely result from release of the information at issue. *See id.*; ORD 661; *see also National Parks & Conservation Ass’n v. Morton*, 498 F.2d 765 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

Upon review, we find that HP and Prime have demonstrated that release of their pricing information and customer lists would cause the companies substantial competitive harm. Accordingly, we have marked the information that must be withheld under section 552.110(b). However, we conclude that HP and Prime have made only conclusory allegations and have provided no specific factual or evidentiary showing to support their allegations that release of the remaining information at issue would cause their companies substantial competitive injury. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.110; *see also, e.g.*, 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), 509 at 5 (1988) (because costs, bid specifications, and circumstances would change for future contracts, assertion that release of bid proposal might give competitor unfair advantage on future contracts is too speculative), 319 at 3 (1982) (information relating to organization and personnel, market studies, and qualifications not ordinarily excepted from disclosure under statutory predecessor to section 552.110). Thus, no portion of the remaining information pertaining to these companies may be withheld under section 552.110(b).

We also find that HP and Prime have failed to make a *prima facie* case that any of the remaining information belonging to these companies constitutes a trade secret. Thus, no portion of the remaining information pertaining to these companies may be withheld under section 552.110(a).

We note that the remaining submitted information contains insurance policy numbers. Section 552.136 of the Government Code states that “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is

collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential.”² Gov’t Code § 552.136. Accordingly, the district must withhold the insurance policy numbers we have marked under section 552.136.

Finally, we note that some of the materials at issue appear to 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 protected by copyright. Attorney General Opinion JM-672 (1987): A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.* If a member of the public wishes to make copies of materials protected by copyright, 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. *See* Open Records Decision No. 550 (1990).

In summary, we have marked the information that must be withheld under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. Insurance policy numbers must be withheld under section 552.136 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released, but any copyrighted information may only be released in accordance with copyright law.

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 file suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3). If the governmental body does not file suit over 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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the

²This office will raise a mandatory exception like section 552.136 on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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 challenge 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 Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/mcf

Ref: ID# 318963

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