



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 3, 2014

Ms. Elizabeth Hanshaw Winn
Assistant County Attorney
Travis County
P.O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767-1748

OR2014-09422

Dear Ms. Winn:

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# 524682.

The Travis County Purchasing Office (the "county") received eight requests from different requestors for various types of information pertaining to proposals for a specified RFP. You indicate you have released some of the information to the requestors. Although you take no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, you state release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of Recovery Healthcare Corporation ("Recovery"), SecureTracks GPS ("SecureTracks"), Sentinel Offender Services, LLC ("Sentinel"), and Victim Safety First, LLC ("Victim Safety"). Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified Recovery, SecureTracks, Sentinel, and Victim Safety 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 have received

comments from Recovery. We have considered the submitted arguments and 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 to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this ruling, we have not received comments from SecureTracks, Sentinel, or Victim Safety. Thus, we have no basis to conclude SecureTracks, Sentinel, or Victim Safety has a protected proprietary interest in the submitted information. *See id.* § 552.110(a)-(b); 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 county may not withhold any of the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest SecureTracks, Sentinel, or Victim Safety may have in the information.

Section 552.110 of the Government Code 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). The Texas Supreme Court has adopted the definition of trade secret from section 757 of the Restatement of Torts. *See Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 763 (Tex. 1957); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 552 (1990). Section 757 provides that a trade secret is:

any formula, pattern, device or compilation of information which is used in one's business, and which gives him 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 A trade secret is a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business. . . . [It may] 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 Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d at 776. In determining whether particular information constitutes a trade secret, this office considers the Restatement's definition of trade secret as well as the Restatement's list of six trade

secret factors.¹ RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b. This office must accept a claim that information subject to the Act is excepted as a trade secret if a *prima facie* case for the exception is made and no argument is submitted that rebuts the claim as a matter of law. See ORD 552 at 5. However, we cannot conclude section 552.110(a) is applicable unless it has been shown the information meets the definition of a trade secret and the necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish a trade secret claim. See Open Records Decision No. 402 (1983). We note pricing information pertaining to a particular contract is generally not a trade secret because it is “simply information as to single or ephemeral events in the conduct of the business,” rather than “a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business.” RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b; see also *Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d at 776; Open Record Decision Nos. 255 (1980), 232 (1979), 217 (1978).

Recovery claims its submitted customer information constitutes a trade secret under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. Upon review, we find Recovery has established a *prima facie* case that its customer information constitutes trade secret information. Therefore, Recovery’s submitted customer information must generally be withheld under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. However, to the extent any of the customer information Recovery seeks to withhold has been published on the company’s website, such information is not confidential under section 552.110(a) and may not be withheld on that basis.

Section 552.136(b) of the Government Code provides, “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of [the Act], 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(b); see *id.* § 552.136(a) (defining “access device”). This office has concluded insurance policy numbers constitute access device numbers for purposes of

¹The Restatement of Torts lists the following six factors as indicia of whether information constitutes a trade secret:

- (1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company];
- (2) the extent to which it is known by employees and other 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 [its] competitors;
- (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing the information;
- (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 at 2 (1982), 306 at 2 (1982), 255 at 2 (1980).

²The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. See Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

section 552.136. Accordingly, the county must withhold the insurance policy numbers we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code.

In summary, to the extent Recovery's customer information is not publicly available on the company's website, the county must withhold Recovery's submitted customer information under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. The county must withhold the insurance policy numbers we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code. The county 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 http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,


Meredith L. Coffman
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MLC/dls

Ref: ID# 524682

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Richard Aldrich
Account Manager
SecureTracks GPS
12126 El Sendero Street
San Antonio, Texas 78233
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Rachele L. Smith
Victim Safety First, LLC
707 West 10th Street
Austin, Texas 78701
(w/o enclosures)