



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

November 25, 2014

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

OR2014-21483

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# 544651.

The Travis County Purchasing Office (the "county") received a request for the documents submitted by eight specified third parties in response to a specified request for proposals.<sup>1</sup> Although you take no position with respect to the public availability of the requested information, you state the proprietary interests of certain third parties might be implicated. Accordingly, you notified Aetna Life Insurance Company; Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas; Davis Vision, Inc.; National Vision Administrators, L.L.C. ("NVA"); EyeMed Vision Care ("EyeMed"); MES Vision; Superior Vision; and UnitedHealthcare of the request and of their right to submit arguments to this office explaining why their information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305 (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits

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<sup>1</sup>You note the county sought and received clarification of the request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.222(b) (providing that if request for information is unclear, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify the request); *see also* *City of Dallas v. Abbott*, 304 S. W.3d 380,387 (Tex. 2010) (holding that when a governmental entity, acting in good faith, requests clarification or narrowing of an unclear or overbroad request for public information, the ten-day period to request an attorney general ruling is measured from the date the request is clarified or narrowed).

governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in certain circumstances). We have received arguments submitted by EyeMed and NVA. 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 letter, we have only received comments from EyeMed and NVA. Thus, none of the remaining third parties have demonstrated they have a protected proprietary interest in any of 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 portion of the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interests the remaining third parties may have in the information.

We note NVA seeks to withhold information the county has not submitted to this office for our review. This ruling does not address that information and is limited to the information submitted as responsive by the county. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(D) (governmental body requesting decision from Attorney General must submit copy of specific information requested).

EyeMed and NVA claim portions of their proposals are excepted from disclosure under section 552.110 of the Government Code, which 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). Section 552.110(a) protects trade secrets obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision. *Id.* § 552.110(a). 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 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. *See* 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. *Id.*; *see also* Open Records Decision 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).

Upon review, we find EyeMed and NVA have established a *prima facie* case their customer information at issue constitutes trade secret information for purposes of section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. Accordingly, to the extent the customer information EyeMed and NVA seek to withhold is not publicly available on their respective websites, the county must withhold such information under section 552.110(a). However, EyeMed and NVA have

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<sup>2</sup>The 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).

failed to demonstrate any of their remaining information meets the definition of a trade secret, nor has either demonstrated the necessary factors to establish a trade secret claim for the remaining information. *See* ORD 402, 319 at 3 (information relating to organization and personnel, professional references, market studies, qualifications, and pricing are not ordinarily excepted from disclosure under statutory predecessor to section 552.110). We note pricing information pertaining to a particular proposal or 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.” *See* RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b; *Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d at 776; ORDs 319 at 3, 306 at 3. Thus, none of the remaining information at issue may be withheld under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code.

EyeMed and NVA also claim portions of their proposals constitute commercial or financial information, the disclosure of which would cause the companies substantial competitive harm. Upon review, we find EyeMed and NVA have established their pricing information, which we have marked, constitutes commercial or financial information, the release of which would cause the companies substantial competitive injury. Therefore, the county must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. However, having considered EyeMed’s and NVA’s arguments under section 552.110(b) for the remaining information, we find neither party has demonstrated substantial competitive injury would result from the release of any of its remaining information. *See* Open Records Decisions Nos. 661, 319 at 3, 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), 175 at 4 (1977) (resumes cannot be said to fall within any exception to the Act). Therefore, the county may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code.

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.”<sup>3</sup> 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 section 552.136. Thus, the county must withhold the insurance policy numbers we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code.

We note some of the information being released is 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 copyrighted. Open Records Decision No. 180 at 3 (1977). However, a

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<sup>3</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. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.*; see Open Records Decision No. 109 (1975). If a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, 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.

In summary, the county must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.110 of the Government Code. The county must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released; however, any information subject to copyright may only be released in accordance with copyright law.

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](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,



Joseph Behnke  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JB/som

Ref: ID# 544651

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Ulysses Lee  
General Counsel  
National Vision Administrators, LLC  
1200 Route 46 West  
Clifton, New Jersey 07013  
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Louie Heerwagen  
Aetna Life Insurance Company  
151 Farmington Avenue  
Hartford, Connecticut 06156  
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Melissa Jones  
Director of Sales  
Davis Vision, Inc.  
526 Kingwood Drive, Suite 363  
Kingwood, Texas 77339  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Rick Kjerstad  
Vice President of Major Accounts  
Superior Vision  
11101 White Rock Road  
Rancho Cardova, California 95670  
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Lauren Gundler  
Senior Manger  
Sales Operations  
EyeMed Vision Care  
4000 Luxottica Place  
Mason, Ohio 45040  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Don Kennedy  
Regional Sales Executive  
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas  
P.O. Box 655730  
Dallas, Texas 75265  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Kerry Carpio  
Regional Manager/Southern Region  
MES Vision  
P.O. Box 90937  
Austin, Texas 78709  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Matt Nolte  
Director of Account Management  
UnitedHealthcare  
1250 South Capital of Texas Highway,  
Suite 360  
Austin, Texas 78764  
(w/o enclosures)