



KEN PAXTON  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 8, 2016

Ms. Jennifer Burnett  
Attorney & Public Information Coordinator  
Office of General Counsel  
The University of Texas System  
201 West Seventh Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2016-13006

Dear Ms. Burnett:

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# 613336 (OGC# 168454).

The University of Texas System (the "system") received a request for a specified agreement, and any amendments, between the system and a named entity. Although you take no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, you state release of this information may implicate the proprietary interests of Morris & Dickson Co., LLC ("Morris"). Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified Morris of the request for information and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the information at issue 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 arguments from Morris. We have considered the exceptions claimed and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.104(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information that, if released, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder." Gov't Code § 552.104(a). A private third party may invoke this exception. *Boeing Co. v. Paxton*, 466 S.W.3d 831 (Tex. 2015). The "test under section 552.104 is whether knowing another bidder's [or competitor's information] would be an advantage, not whether it would be a decisive advantage." *Id.* at 841. Morris states it has competitors. In addition, Morris states its

information is “competitively sensitive” and release of the information “would have a negative impact on [Morris] and give its competitors advantages over [Morris] in future bids.” For many years, this office concluded the terms of a contract and especially the pricing of a winning bidder are public and generally not excepted from disclosure. Gov’t Code § 552.022(a)(3) (contract involving receipt or expenditure of public funds expressly made public); Open Records Decision Nos. 541 at 8 (1990) (public has interest in knowing terms of contract with state agency), 514 (1988) (public has interest in knowing prices charged by government contractors); 494 (1988) (requiring balancing of public interest in disclosure with competitive injury to company); *see generally* Freedom of Information Act Guide & Privacy Act Overview, 219 (2000) (federal cases applying analogous Freedom of Information Act reasoning that disclosure of prices charged government is a cost of doing business with government). However, now, pursuant to *Boeing*, section 552.104 is not limited to only ongoing competitive situations, and a third party need only show release of its competitively sensitive information would give an advantage to a competitor even after a contract is executed. *Boeing*, 466 S.W.3d at 831, 839. After review of the information at issue and consideration of the arguments, we find Morris has established the release of the information at issue would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, we conclude the system may withhold the submitted information under section 552.104(a).<sup>1</sup>

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,



Ashley Crutchfield  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

AC/dls

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<sup>1</sup>As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining argument against disclosure.

Ref: ID# 613336

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party  
(w/o enclosures)