



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 13, 2016

Mr. Eric D. Bentley
Associate General Counsel
University of Houston System
311 E. Cullen Building
Houston, Texas 77204-2028

OR2016-15823

Dear Mr. Bentley:

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# 618133.

The University of Houston (the "university") received a request for a specified contract. 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 Aramark Educational Services of Texas, LLC ("Aramark"). Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified Aramark of the request for information and of its 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 Aramark. We have considered the submitted arguments 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). In considering whether a private third party may assert this exception, the supreme court reasoned because section 552.305(a) of the Government Code includes section 552.104 as an example of an exception that involves a third party's property interest, 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. Aramark

states it has competitors. In addition, Aramark states the requested information “contains competitively sensitive information that would provide Aramark’s competitors with an advantage if that information were disclosed.” 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 831 at 831, 839. After review of the information at issue and consideration of the arguments, we find Aramark has established the release of the information at issue would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, we conclude university may withhold the information we marked under section 552.104(a) of the Government Code. As no further exceptions to disclosure have been raised, the remaining information must be released.

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,



Matthew Taylor
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MHT/dls

Ref: ID# 618133

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party
(w/o enclosures)