ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 12, 2007

Ms. R. Yvette Clark
General Counsel
Stephen F. Austin State University
P.O. Box 13065
Nacogdoches, Texas 75962-3065

OR2007-16408

Dear Ms. Clark:

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# 297055.

Stephen F. Austin State University (the "university") received a request for four categories of information pertaining to the university's food service contract. Although you take no position with respect to the public availability of the information, you believe that this information implicates the interests of Aramark. You state, and provide documentation showing, that you notified Aramark of this 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) (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 in certain circumstances). We have reviewed the arguments and submitted information.

Initially, we note that the request at issue seeks four categories of documents. You have not submitted information responsive to the third category of the request, which seeks the names of respondents to the university's last food service RFP. To the extent any information responsive to this category existed on the date the university received this request, we assume you have released it. If you have not released any such records, you must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if

governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible).

Aramark asserts that Appendix B and portions of Appendix E of its proposal constitute trade secrets. Section 552.110(a) protects trade secrets. *See* Gov't Code § 552.110(a). Section 552.110(a) protects the property interests of private parties by excepting from disclosure trade secrets obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision. *See id.* § 552.110(a).

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. 1958); Open Records Decision Nos. 255 (1980), 232 (1979), 217 (1978).

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. Open Records Decision No. 552 (1990). 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).

We note, however, that Aramark acknowledges that the information in Appendix B and Appendix E consists of information developed for this university contract in particular. Thus, we conclude that Aramark fails to make a prima facie showing that any of the information at issue consists of a trade secret. *See* Open Records Decision No. 552 at 5-6 (1990); *see also* Restatement of Torts § 757 cmt. b (1939) (information is generally not trade

secret if 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"). Accordingly, no portion of Appendix B or Appendix E may be withheld under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. As no other exception to disclosure of the submitted information is raised, it must be released to the requestor.

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), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal 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).

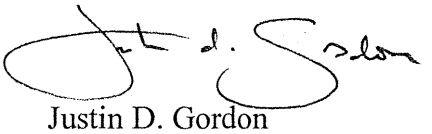
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the 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,



Justin D. Gordon
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JDG/jh

Ref: ID# 297055

Enc. Submitted documents

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