



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 28, 2008

Mr. Scott A. Kelly
Deputy General Counsel
Texas A&M University System
A&M System Building, Suite 2079
200 Technology Way
College Station, Texas 77845-3424

OR2008-01271

Dear Mr. Kelly:

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# 300652.

Texas A&M University (the "university") received a request for information pertaining to two specified contracts. Although you take no position with respect to the public availability of the information, you believe that this information implicates the proprietary interests of Sigma-Aldrich, Inc. ("Sigma-Aldrich") and Dimension Medical Supply Group ("Dimension"). You state, and provide documentation showing, that you notified these parties of this 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) (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 submitted information.

We note that an interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should be withheld from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, we have not received comments from Sigma-Aldrich or Dimension explaining why the submitted information should not be

released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude that either of these parties has protected proprietary interests in any of the submitted information. *See id.* § 552.110; 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 (1990). Accordingly, we conclude that the university may not withhold any portion of the submitted information based on the proprietary interests of Sigma-Aldrich or Dimension. As no other exception to disclosure is raised for the submitted information, 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# 300652

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Stephanie Richmond
Stellargy Services, LLC
5508 Highway 290 West, Suite 206
Austin, Texas 78735
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Daryl Bridges
Sigma-Aldrich, Inc.
3050 Spruce Street
St. Louis, Missouri 63103
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Cynthia Fitzgerald
Dimension Medical Supply Group
6913 K Avenue, Suite 315
Plano, Texas 75074
(w/o enclosures)