



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

GREG ABBOTT

August 11, 2008

Ms. Carolyn Hanahan
Fort Bend Independent School District
16431 Lexington Boulevard
Sugar Land, Texas 77479

OR2008-10897

Dear Ms. Hanahan:

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# 318602.

The Fort Bend Independent School District (the "district") received three requests for information pertaining to the request for qualifications for outside legal services for the collection of delinquent property taxes. You state you have released a portion of the requested information to the requestors. Although you take no position on the submitted information, you state it may contain proprietary information subject to exception under the Act. Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, the district notified Perdue, Brandon, Fielder, Collins & Mott, LLP ("Perdue") and Linebarger, Goggan, Blair & Sampson, LLP ("Linebarger") of the requests for information and of each company's 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 reviewed the submitted information.

We note 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 requested information relating to it should be withheld from disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, neither Purdue nor Linebarger has submitted to this office any reasons explaining why its submitted information should not be released. Therefore, Purdue and Linebarger have not provided us with any basis to conclude they have protected proprietary interests in any of the submitted information. *See* 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, we conclude the district may not withhold any portion of the submitted information on the basis of the proprietary interests that Purdue or Linebarger may have in the information.

We note portions of the submitted information are subject to section 552.136 of the Government Code.¹ Section 552.136 of the Government Code states “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, 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.” Gov’t Code § 552.136. Upon review, we find the district must withhold the insurance policy numbers we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code. As no arguments against disclosure of the remaining information have been raised for the remaining information, it must be released.

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). If the governmental body does not file suit over 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

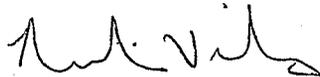
¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

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,



Melanie J. Villars
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MJV/jh

Ref: ID# 318602

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Michael J. Siwierka
Perdue, Brandon, Fielder, Collins & Mott, LLP
1235 North Loop West, Suite 600
Houston, Texas 77008
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Damon Edwards
Linebarger, Goggan, Blair & Sampson, L.L.P.
P.O. Box 3064
Houston, Texas 77253
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Pierce M. Adkins
Wells Fargo Tower
6161 Savoy Drive, Suite 801
Houston, Texas 77036
(w/o enclosures)