



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 28, 2010

Ms. Neera Chatterjee
Office of General Counsel
The University of Texas System
201 West Seventh Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2902

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OR2010-11333

Dear Ms. Chatterjee:

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# 388378 (OGC# 130454).

The University of Texas at Tyler (the "university") received a request for the winning proposals and tally sheets pertaining to IFB #750-08/09-12. You state the university will release the responsive tally sheets. You also state the university will redact insurance policy numbers from the responsive information under section 552.136 of the Government Code pursuant to Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009).¹ Although you take no position as to whether the remaining submitted information is excepted under the Act, you state that release of this information may implicate the proprietary interests of third parties. Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified the General Revenue Corporation and Williams & Fudge, Inc. ("W&F") of the 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) (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

¹Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009) is a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold ten categories of information, including insurance policy numbers under section 552.136 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.

received comments from W&F. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, 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, this office has not received comments from the General Revenue Corporation explaining why its submitted information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude that the General Revenue Corporation has a protected proprietary interest in 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. Accordingly, the university may not withhold any portion of the submitted information based upon the proprietary interests of the General Revenue Corporation.

W&F asserts that some of its information is excepted under section 552.101 of the Government Code, which excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses information that is considered to be confidential under other constitutional, statutory, or decisional law. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 611 at 1 (1992) (common-law privacy), 600 at 4 (1992) (constitutional privacy), 478 at 2 (1987) (statutory confidentiality). W&F has not directed our attention to, and we are not aware of, any law under which any of its information is considered to be confidential for the purposes of section 552.101. Therefore, we conclude that the university may not withhold the submitted information under section 552.101.

Next, we understand W&F to assert that portions of its submitted proposal are excepted from public disclosure under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. Gov't Code § 552.110(a). Section 552.110(a) protects the proprietary 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).

There are six factors to be assessed in determining whether information qualifies as a trade secret:

- (1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company's] business;
- (2) the extent to which it is known by employees and others involved in [the company's] business;
- (3) the extent of measures taken by [the company] to guard the secrecy of the information;
- (4) the value of the information to [the company] and to [its] competitors;
- (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing the information; and
- (6) the ease or difficulty with which the information could be properly acquired or duplicated by others.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also* ORD 232. 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 at 2 (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).

Upon review, we find W&F has made a *prima facie* case that its client information, which we have marked, is protected as trade secret information. Accordingly, the university must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code.

However, we find W&F has failed to demonstrate that any portion of its remaining information constitutes a trade secret. Accordingly, none of W&F's remaining information may be withheld from disclosure under section 552.110(a).

Finally, we note that some of the remaining information at issue is protected by copyright. A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information, but a custodian of public records must comply with copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are copyrighted. *See* Attorney General Opinion JM-672 (1987). Thus, if a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit. *See* Open Records Decision No. 550 (1990).

In summary, the university must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. With the exception of the insurance policy numbers the university states will be redacted under section 552.136 of the Government Code pursuant to Open Records Decision No. 684, the remaining information must be released. However, any information protected by copyright may only be released in accordance with copyright law.

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.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, 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 must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Luttrall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JL/dls

Ref: ID# 388378

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

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