



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
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July 11, 2013

Ms. Haley Turner
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OR2013-11853

Dear Ms. Turner:

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# 492775.

The Austin Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received two requests from the same requestor for proposals submitted by Catapult Learning ("Catapult") and The Princeton Review ("TPR") in response to RFP Q12-001, High Dosage Tutoring, for two specified schools for the 2012-2013 school year, as well as the score sheets and executed contracts pertaining to the proposals at issue. 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 Catapult and TPR. Accordingly, you state you notified the companies 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 received comments from Catapult and TPR. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Catapult raises section 552.104 of the Government Code, which excepts from disclosure "information that, if released, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder." Gov't Code § 552.104(a). As Catapult acknowledges, however, this section is a discretionary exception that only protects the interests of a governmental body, as distinguished from exceptions that

are intended to protect the interests of third parties. *See* Open Records Decision No. 592 at 8 (1991) (statutory predecessor to section 552.104 designed to protect interests of a governmental body in a competitive situation, and not interests of private parties submitting information to the government). Therefore, because the district did not raise this exception, we will not consider section 552.104 of the Government Code for Catapult's information.

Catapult and TPR raise section 552.110 of the Government Code for portions of their information. Section 552.110(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "[a] trade secret obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.110(a). The Texas Supreme Court has adopted the definition of trade secret from section 757 of the Restatement of Torts. *Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 763 (Tex. 1958); *see also* Open Records Decision 552 at 5 (1990). Section 757 provides a trade secret is

any formula, pattern, device or compilation of information which is used in one's business, and which gives him 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 A trade secret is a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business [It may] 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 Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d at 776. In determining whether particular information constitutes a trade secret, this office considers the Restatement's definition of trade secret as well as the Restatement's list of six trade secret factors.¹ RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939). This office must accept a private person's claim for exception as valid under section 552.110 if that person establishes

¹The following are the six factors the Restatement gives as indicia of whether information constitutes a trade secret:

- (1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company];
- (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 [its] competitors;
- (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing the information;
- (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* Open Records Decision Nos. 319 at 2 (1982), 306 at 2 (1982), 255 at 2 (1980).

a *prima facie* case for exception and no argument is submitted that rebuts the claim as a matter of law. ORD 552 at 5-6. However, we cannot conclude section 552.110(a) applies unless it has been shown the information meets the definition of a trade secret and the necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish a trade secret claim. *See* Open Records Decision No. 402 (1983).

Section 552.110(b) excepts from disclosure “[c]ommercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained.” Gov’t Code § 552.110(b). Section 552.110(b) requires a specific factual or evidentiary showing, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that substantial competitive injury would likely result from release of the requested information. *See* Open Records Decision No. 661 at 5-6 (1990) (business enterprise must show by specific factual evidence that release of information would cause it substantial competitive harm).

Catapult and TPR contend portions of their information constitute trade secrets under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. Upon review, we find Catapult has established some of its customer information constitutes a trade secret; therefore, the district must withhold this information, which we have marked, under section 552.110(a). However, we note Catapult has made some of its customer information publicly available on its website. Because Catapult itself published this information, we are unable to conclude such information is proprietary. Upon review we find Catapult and TPR failed to establish a *prima facie* case that any of the remaining information at issue is a trade secret protected by section 552.110(a). *See* ORDs 402 (section 552.110(a) does not apply unless information meets definition of trade secret and necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish trade secret claim), 319 at 2 (information relating to organization, personnel, market studies, professional references, qualifications, experience, and pricing not excepted under section 552.110). We further note pricing information pertaining to a particular contract is generally not a trade secret because 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.” RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b; *see Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d at 776; ORD 319 at 3, 306 at 3. Therefore, the district may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code.

Catapult also claims its remaining information at issue, including pricing information and the remaining customer information, constitutes commercial or financial information that, if released, would cause the company substantial competitive harm. After reviewing the submitted arguments and the information at issue, we find Catapult has established release of its pricing information pertaining to its Martin Middle School proposal would cause it substantial competitive harm. Therefore, the district must withhold this information, which we have marked, under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. However, we note Catapult was awarded the contract for Mendez Middle School. This office considers the prices charged in government contract awards to be a matter of strong public interest; thus, the pricing information of a winning bidder is generally not excepted under

section 552.110(b). *See* Open Records Decision No. 514 (1988) (public has interest in knowing prices charged by government contractors). *See generally* Dep't of Justice Guide to the Freedom of Information Act 344-345 (2009) (federal cases applying analogous Freedom of Information Act reasoning that disclosure of prices charged government is a cost of doing business with government). Moreover, because Catapult has published its remaining customer information on its website, the company has failed to demonstrate how release of this information would cause it substantial competitive harm. Furthermore, we find Catapult has not demonstrated how release of its remaining information at issue would cause it substantial competitive harm, and has provided no specific factual or evidentiary showing to support such assertions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 661 (for information to be withheld under commercial or financial information prong of section 552.110, business must show by specific factual evidence that substantial competitive injury would result from release of particular information at issue), 509 at 5 (1988) (because bid specifications and circumstances would change for future contracts, assertion that release of bid proposal might give competitor unfair advantage on future contracts is too speculative). Consequently, the district may not withhold any of Catapult's remaining information under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code.

In summary, the district must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.110 of the Government Code. The district must release the remaining information.

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,



Cynthia G. Tynan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CGT/akg

Ref: ID# 492775

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

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