



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 16, 2016

Ms. Laura Rodriguez McLean  
Counsel for Carroll Independent School District  
Walsh Gallegos Trevino Russo & Kyle P.C.  
P.O. Box 168046  
Irving, Texas 75062

OR2016-03700

Dear Ms. McLean:

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# 598472.

The Carroll Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified contract. Although you take no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under the Act, you state release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of Blackboard, Inc. ("Blackboard"). Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified Blackboard of the 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) (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 Blackboard. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.110 of the Government Code protects (1) trade secrets, and (2) commercial or financial information the disclosure of which would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained. *See* Gov't Code § 552.110(a)-(b). Section 552.110(a) protects trade secrets obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision. *Id.* § 552.110(a). The Texas Supreme Court has

adopted the definition of trade secret from section 757 of the Restatement of Torts, which holds a trade secret to be:

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 Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 776 (Tex. 1958). 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.<sup>1</sup> This office must accept a claim that information subject to the Act is excepted as a trade secret if a *prima facie* case for the exception is made and no argument is submitted that rebuts the claim as a matter of law. *See Open Records Decision No. 552 at 5* (1990). However, we cannot conclude section 552.110(a) is applicable 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. *Open Records Decision No. 402* (1983).

Section 552.110(b) protects “[c]ommercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained[.]” Gov’t Code

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<sup>1</sup>The Restatement of Torts lists the following six factors 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 other 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 ; *see Open Records Decision Nos. 319 at 2* (1982), *306 at 2* (1982), *255 at 2* (1980).

§ 552.110(b). This exception to disclosure requires a specific factual or evidentiary showing, not conclusory or generalized allegations, substantial competitive injury would likely result from release of the information at issue. *Id.*; *see also* Open Records Decision 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).

Blackboard contends some of its information constitutes trade secrets under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. Upon review, we find Blackboard has failed to establish a *prima facie* case the information at issue meets the definition of a trade secret. Moreover, we find Blackboard has not demonstrated the necessary factors to establish a trade secret claim for the remaining information at issue. *See* ORD 402. We further note pricing information pertaining to a particular proposal or 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.” *See* RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b; *Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d at 776; ORDs 319 at 3, 306 at 3. Therefore, none of the information at issue may be withheld under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code.

We further understand Blackboard to argue portions of its information consist of commercial information, the release of which would cause the company substantial competitive harm under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. Upon review, we find Blackboard has failed to demonstrate the release of any of its information would result in substantial harm to its competitive position. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 661, 509 at 5 (1988) (because costs, 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), 319 at 3 (information relating to organization and personnel, professional references, market studies, qualifications, and pricing are not ordinarily excepted from disclosure under statutory predecessor to section 552.110). Furthermore, we note the contract at issue was awarded to Blackboard. 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). Accordingly, the district may not withhold any of Blackboard’s information under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. As no other exceptions to disclosure have been raised, the submitted information must be released.

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](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,



Mili Gosar  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MG/bw

Ref: ID# 598472

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

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