



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 4, 2016

Ms. Jennifer Burnett
Attorney and Public Information Coordinator
Office of the General Counsel
University of Texas System
201 West Seventh Street, Suite 600
Austin, Texas 78701-2901

OR2016-22265

Dear Ms. Burnett:

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# 633494 (OGC# 171421).

The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (the "university") received a request for information pertaining to RFP 16-029. The university states it has released some of the requested information, but claims some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. The university does not take a position as to whether the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under the Act. However, the university states, and provides documentation showing, it notified G&G Organization Ltd. d/b/a PFS Group ("G&G") of the university's receipt of the request for information and of G&G's right to submit arguments to this office as to why the requested information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 at 3 (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 G&G objecting to the release of some of the information at issue under section 552.104 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note G&G has submitted to this office information it asserts is excepted from release under section 552.104 of the Government Code. However, the university did not submit this information for our review. This ruling does not address information beyond

what the university has submitted to us for review. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(D) (governmental body requesting decision from attorney general must submit copy of specific information requested). Accordingly, this ruling is limited to the information the university submitted as responsive to the request for information. *See id.*

Section 552.104(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information that, if released, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder.” Gov't Code § 552.104(a). In considering whether a private third party may assert this exception, the supreme court reasoned because section 552.305(a) of the Government Code includes section 552.104 as an example of an exception that involves a third party's property interest, the court concluded a private third party may invoke this exception. *Boeing Co. v. Paxton*, 466 S.W.3d 831, 841 (Tex. 2015). The “test under section 552.104 is whether knowing another bidder's [or competitor's information] would be an advantage, not whether it would be a decisive advantage.” *Id.* G&G states it has competitors. In addition, G&G states release of the information it has marked under section 552.104 would cause it substantial competitive harm and seeks to withhold the terms of a contract. For many years, this office concluded the terms of a contract and especially the pricing of a winning bidder are public and generally not excepted from disclosure. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(3) (contract involving receipt or expenditure of public funds expressly made public); Open Records Decision Nos. 541 at 8 (1990) (public has interest in knowing terms of contract with state agency), 514 (1988) (public has interest in knowing prices charged by government contractors), 494 (1988) (requiring balancing of public interest in disclosure with competitive injury to company). *See generally* Freedom of Information Act Guide & Privacy Act Overview, 219 (2000) (federal cases applying analogous Freedom of Information Act reasoning that disclosure of prices charged government is a cost of doing business with government). However, now, pursuant to the *Boeing* decision, section 552.104 is not limited to only ongoing competitive situations, and a third party need only show release of its competitively sensitive information would give an advantage to a competitor even after a contract is executed. *Boeing*, 466 S.W.3d at 831, 839. After review of the information at issue and consideration of the arguments, we find G&G has established the release of the information it has marked would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, we conclude the university may withhold the information that G&G has marked under section 552.104(a).

Section 552.111 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[a]n interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency[.]” Gov't Code § 552.111. This exception encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of section 552.111 is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990).

In Open Records Decision No. 615, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* ORD 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995).

Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events that are severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *See* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

The university states the information it has marked under section 552.111 relates to internal communications reflecting the deliberative and policymaking processes of university employees in ranking the bid proposals at issue. It argues disclosure of the information at issue would hinder the decision making process of the university. Upon review, we agree this information consists of advice, opinions, and recommendations related to policymaking. Thus, the university may withhold the information it has marked under section 52.111 of the Government Code and the deliberative process privilege.

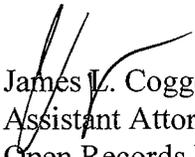
To conclude, the university may withhold the information that G&G has marked under section 552.104(a) of the Government Code. The university may withhold the information it has marked under section 52.111 of the Government Code. The university must release the remaining information.

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,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/bw

Ref: ID# 633494

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party
(w/o enclosures)