



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
DIVISION OF PURCHASE AND PROPERTY
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
33 WEST STATE STREET
P. O. BOX 039

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625-0039
<https://www.njstart.gov>
Telephone (609) 292-4886 / Facsimile (609) 984-2575

ROBERT A. ROMANO
Acting State Treasurer

JIGNASA DESAI-MCCLEARY
Director

CHRIS CHRISTIE
Governor

KIM GUADAGNO
Lt. Governor

July 7, 2015

Via Electronic Mail [LeporesService@aol.com] and USPS Regular Mail

Sharon St. John, Operations Manager
EL-Bo, Inc., dba Lepore's Service Center
380 Herbertsville Rd.
Brick, NJ 08724

RE: Protest of Notice of Proposal Rejection
RFP #15-X-23841 OEM and Non-OEM Maintenance and Repair Services for Light/Medium
Duty Vehicles, 15,000 lb. GVWR or Less (T-0126)

Dear Ms. St. John:

This correspondence is in response to your letter of protest, dated and received May 13, 2015, on behalf of EL-Bo, Inc., dba Lepore's Service Center ("EL-Bo") to the Division of Purchase and Property ("the Division"). The record of this procurement notes that EL-Bo's proposal was rejected for failing to include a properly completed *Ownership Disclosure Form* and *Disclosure of Investment Activities in Iran Form*. In your letter, you acknowledge that the documents visible in the Division's eBid system do not contained the required signatures, yet you assert the forms were all properly completed and uploaded with EL-Bo's proposal submission. As such, you seek reconsideration of the Proposal Review Unit's rejection of EL-Bo's proposal and ask that the proposal be reinstated.

I have reviewed the record of this procurement, including the RFP, EL-Bo's proposal, and relevant statutes, regulations, and case law. This review has provided me with the information necessary to determine the facts of this matter and to render an informed determination on the merits of EL-Bo's protest. Therefore, I am denying your request for an in-person presentation. See N.J.A.C. 17:12-3.3(d)(1) (stating the "Director has sole discretion to determine if an in-person presentation by the protester is necessary to reach an informed decision on the matter(s) of the protest").¹

The above-referenced solicitation was comprised of the RFP and other documents, one of which was the three-part document titled *NJ Standard RFP Forms*. This document is comprised of three expandable forms, namely an *Ownership Disclosure Form*, a *Disclosure of Investigations and Other Actions Involving Bidder Form*, and a *Disclosure of Investment Activities in Iran Form*.

¹ The Division's administrative rules governing its procurement programs are set forth in N.J.A.C. 17:12. These rules can be accessed at <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/purchase/AdminCode.shtml>.

These forms are addressed in RFP Section 4.0, *Proposal Preparation and Submission*. The relevant text reads as follows:

4.4.1.2 NJ STANDARD RFP FORMS

One of the downloadable RFP documents is titled NJ STANDARD RFP FORMS. It is comprised of three separate forms, two of which (Ownership Disclosure and Disclosure of Investment Activities in Iran) discussed below, must be completed, signed and submitted with the bidder's proposal. **The bidder is cautioned that failure to complete, sign and submit either of these two forms will be cause to reject its proposal as non-responsive as noted below.** If the bidder submits a hard copy proposal, each of the two forms must be physically signed.

If the bidder is submitting an electronic proposal through the Division's eBid system, there are only two acceptable forms of signature for the two forms:

1. The bidder may download the document, physically complete and sign each form, scan the completed document and then upload it, or
2. The bidder may download the document, type the name of the signatory in the space designated for certification signature in each of the forms and then upload the document.

Note: A bidder's entry of a Personal Identification Number (PIN) shall not suffice as a certifying signature on the forms comprising the NJ STANDARD RFP FORMS document.

4.4.1.2.1 OWNERSHIP DISCLOSURE FORM

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:25-24.2, in the event the bidder is a corporation, partnership or sole proprietorship, the bidder must complete and sign the attached Ownership Disclosure Form. A current completed Ownership Disclosure Form must be received prior to or accompany the submitted proposal. A bidder's failure to submit the completed and signed form with its proposal will result in the rejection of the proposal as non-responsive and preclude the award of a contract to said bidder unless the Division has on file a signed and accurate Ownership Disclosure Form dated and received no more than six months prior to the proposal submission deadline for this procurement. If any ownership change has occurred within the last six months, a new Ownership Disclosure Form must be completed, signed and submitted with the proposal.

4.4.1.2.2 DISCLOSURE OF INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES IN IRAN FORM

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:32-58, the bidder must utilize this Disclosure of Investment Activities in Iran form to certify that neither the bidder, nor one of its parents, subsidiaries, and/or affiliates (as defined in N.J.S.A. 52:32-56(e)(3)), is listed on the Department of the Treasury's List of Persons or Entities Engaging in Prohibited Investment Activities in Iran and that neither the bidder, nor one of its parents, subsidiaries, and/or affiliates, is involved in any of the investment activities set forth in N.J.S.A. 52:32-56(f). If the bidder is unable to so certify, the bidder shall provide a detailed and precise description of such activities as directed on the form. A bidder's failure to submit the completed and signed form with its proposal will result in the rejection of the proposal as nonresponsive and preclude the award of a contract to said bidder.

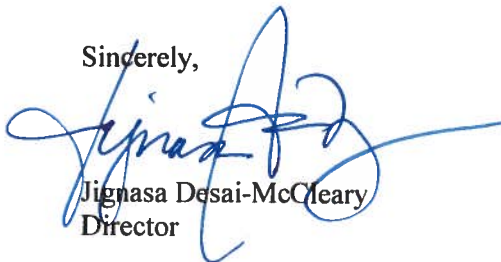
Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 17:12-2.2, a bidder's proposal must "[c]ontain all RFP-required certifications, forms, and attachments, completed and signed as required" or "be subject to automatic rejection." As set forth in RFP 4.4.1.2, 4.4.1.2.1, and 4.4.1.2.2, the submission of a completed and signed *Ownership Disclosure Form* prior to or as part of the proposal and a completed and signed *Disclosure of Investment Activities in Iran Form* as part of a bidder's proposal was required.

In this case, the record indicates that EL-Bo's proposal was rejected for submitting an unsigned *Ownership Disclosure Form* and *Disclosure of Investment Activities in Iran Form*. Although EL-Bo asserts that these forms contained a signature when uploaded to the Division's eBid system, a review of the documents contained in the system contain a blank signature line. Although the eBid system does not allow for proposal submission until all forms have been uploaded, the eBid system cannot differentiate between what documents are uploaded or what information is contained within a document. Rather, it accepts any document the bidder uploads in a required document field. Furthermore, once a proposal is submitted, the only way a document can be altered is if a bidder goes back into its submission prior to the proposal submission deadline, withdraws the entire proposal using a PIN, uploads a new document, and resubmits the entire proposal using a PIN. The responsibility for the contents of the proposal or submittal necessarily and appropriately rests solely with the bidder.

Notwithstanding EL-Bo's interest in competing for this procurement, it would not be in the State's best interests to allow a bidder who did not provide the required information to be eligible to participate in the procurement process. Such acceptance would unlevel the bidders' playing field, as the State received responsive proposals in which all necessary documents and information were provided as required. The deficiency at issue cannot be remedied after the proposal submission deadline, as acceptance of EL-Bo's proposal under these circumstances would be contrary to the provisions of the governing statute and would provide EL-Bo with disclamation options not available to those bidders whose proposals were fully responsive. In light of the findings set forth above, I must deny your request for eligibility to participate in the competition for the subject contract. This is my final agency decision on this matter.

This is an unfortunate situation for the State, as the Division encourages competition and appreciates the time and effort put forth in preparing and submitting EL-Bo's proposal. Thank you for your company's continuing interest in doing business with the State of New Jersey and for registering your business with **NJ START** at www.njstart.gov, the State of New Jersey's new eProcurement system.

Sincerely,



Jignasa Desai-McCleary
Director

JD-M:DF

c: M. Griffin
K. Thomas
V. Bequer
D. Rodriguez
A. Nelson