

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA
Alexandria Division

RAI STRATEGIC HOLDINGS, INC.,)	
<i>et al.</i> ,)	
)	
Plaintiffs,)	
)	
v.)	Civil Action No. 1:20-cv-393 (LO/TCB)
)	
ALTRIA CLIENT SERVICES LLC,)	
<i>et al.</i> ,)	
)	
Defendants.)	
_____)	

ORDER

This matter comes before the Court on Defendants Altria Client Services, LLC, Philip Morris USA Inc., and Philip Morris Products S.A.’s (“Defendants”) Motion Seal (Dkt. 722) and supporting memorandum (Dkt. 725). Defendants seek leave to file under seal an unredacted version of their Opposition to Reynolds’ Motion for Relief from Stipulated Deposition Dates (“Opposition”) and Exhibits 2, 8, 9, and 10. (Dkt. 724.) Plaintiffs RAI Strategic Holdings, Inc. and R.J. Reynolds Vapor Company (“Plaintiffs”) filed a reply in support of Defendants’ motion (Dkt. 744) pursuant to Local Civil Rule 5(C). *See* L. Civ. R. 5(C).

District courts have authority to seal court documents “if the public’s right of access is outweighed by competing interests.” *Ashcraft v. Conoco, Inc.*, 218 F.3d 288, 302 (4th Cir. 2000). Procedurally, a district court may seal court filings if it (1) “provide[s] public notice of the request to seal and allow[s] interested parties a reasonable opportunity to object, (2) consider[s] less drastic alternatives to sealing the documents, and (3) provide[s] specific reasons and factual findings supporting its decision to seal the documents and for rejecting the alternatives.” *Id.*

Upon consideration of the parties' filings, the Court makes the following findings.

First, Defendants have provided public notice of their request to seal and interested parties have been given a reasonable opportunity to object. Defendants filed their motion and public notice on June 16, 2021. (*See* Dkts. 722, 723.) Because over seven days have elapsed since Defendants filed the motion and no interested party has objected, the Court may treat this motion as uncontested under Local Civil Rule 5(C). *See* L. Civ. R. 5(C). Accordingly, Defendants have satisfied this requirement under *Ashcraft* and the Local Civil Rules.

Second, this Court has considered less drastic alternatives. Defendants filed a redacted version of their Opposition on the public docket. (Dkt. 721.) This selective protection of information constitutes the least drastic measure of sealing confidential material. *See Adams v. Object Innovation, Inc.*, No. 3:11cv272-REP-DWD, 2011 WL 7042224, at *4 (E.D. Va. Dec. 5, 2011) “[The] proposal to redact only the proprietary and confidential information, rather than seal the entirety of [the document], constitutes the least drastic method of shielding the information at issue.”, *report and recommendation adopted*, 2012 WL 135428 (E.D. Va. Jan. 17, 2012).

Finally, the Court finds reason to seal the Opposition and Exhibits 2, 8, 9, and 10. The redacted portions contain the parties' confidential, proprietary, and competitively sensitive business information, which is also protected by the protective order in this case. Additionally, the exhibits contain confidential correspondence between counsel and confidential deposition testimony. Release of this information to the public could lead to competitive harm to the parties in this lawsuit and to third parties.

