January 31st, 2020

The Honorable Jay Clayton
Chairman
Securities and Exchange Commission
100 F Street NE
Washington, DC 20549

Vanessa A. Countryman
Secretary
Securities and Exchange Commission
100 F Street NE
Washington, DC 20549-1090

RE: Proposed Rule on Procedural Requirements and Resubmission Thresholds under Exchange Act Rule 14a-8; File Number S7-23-19

Dear Chairman Clayton and Secretary Countryman,

I welcome the opportunity to provide this comment letter on the Securities and Exchange Commission's proposed rulemakings published in the federal register on December 4, 2019 (84 FR 66518 and 84 FR 66458).

I am employed by an investment advisory firm with over $2.5 billion in assets under management from 1,700+ investors. I am concerned about the negative impact that the new rules will have on the voice of shareholders in management oversight.

The founding purpose of the Securities and Exchange Commission is to protect investors, yet the SEC's proposed rules will curtail the rights of investors, especially smaller investors, to raise issues of concern about business practices at the companies they own. Shareholder resolutions are a powerful way to encourage corporate responsibility and discourage practices that are unsustainable, unethical, and increase a company's exposure to legal and reputational risk.

The Proposed Rules Undermine the Rights of Shareholders

The first proposed rule not only dramatically increases the amount of shares investors must hold to file resolutions at their companies, it significantly increases the vote thresholds necessary for refiling, and creates numerous steps that make it more difficult for others to file resolutions on their behalf. The second proposed rule suppresses the voices of independent proxy advisory firms that make informed participation possible for small shareholders. The proposed rules are prejudicial and unnecessary, and we urge the SEC to withdraw them.

These proposed requirements are discriminatory to small investors without justification. Proposals from small shareholders, both individually and in the aggregate, have resulted in significant corporate advancements in gender parity, racial diversity, transparency, labor practices, environmental policies, climate change, and more.

The Proposed Rules Improperly Impinge on Shareholder Rights to Be Represented by Agents

The proposed amendments create burdensome and unequal requirements on shareholders who wish to be represented by agents. As an example, the proposed rules would mandate that shareholders who had a proposal filed by their manager or other an agent must personally make themselves available to the company for dialogue, in person or by phone, within a certain limited period of time. This infringes on investors' rights to select an agent to represent their interests, and is unnecessary to "protect" shareholders, as those agents are bound by a fiduciary duty to their clients. The rules would also prevent an agent from representing more than one shareholder at a given company. Average shareholders with valid concerns about their company's actions who do not have expertise in the complicated filing and no-action process established by the SEC, should be able to be represented by an agent under the same rules as other filers. It is a baseless interference in the representational process to burden and limit their representation, especially with no clear benefit other than, apparently, to limit or prevent the efficient representation of shareholders.

Being represented by agents is a standard mechanism in our society. From realtors to lawyers, individuals, companies, and institutions are often represented by those with experience in a complicated arena. The SEC fails to justify its inappropriate interference in this agency relationship.

Similarly, proxy advisory firms help individuals and institutional investors by providing independent, efficient, and cost-effective research services to inform their proxy voting decisions. This is particularly crucial where fiduciary responsibilities exist. The proposed amendments will slow this process, create additional costs and burdens to the proxy firms and therefore to their clients, and will unfairly allow companies to interfere in the provision of information to shareholders. Companies have ample opportunity to share their opinions and justifications with their shareholders.

There Are No Demonstrable Problems with the Existing Rules

The existing rules work. The number of shareholder proposals have not increased over the years while the majority of issues that have been raised by shareholder proposals have consistently proven to be timely and important in reducing risk to companies and increasing value to shareholders. The SEC's proposed rules have not demonstrated a sufficient need that would justify impinging on important shareholder rights. Because the proposed rules are arbitrary and capricious and detrimental to the rights of shareholders, we urge the SEC to withdraw the proposed rules.

Regards,

Brent Kessel, CEO