

January 11, 2021

VIA E-MAIL (shareholderproposals@sec.gov)

Office of Chief Counsel  
Division of Corporation Finance  
Securities and Exchange Commission  
100 F Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20549

**Re: CVS Health Corporation  
Stockholder Proposal by John Chevedden on behalf of Kenneth Steiner  
Securities Exchange Act of 1934 – Rule 14a-8**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

CVS Health Corporation, a Delaware corporation (the “**Company**”), pursuant to Rule 14a-8(j) under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended (the “**Exchange Act**”), submits this letter to inform the Staff of the Division of Corporation Finance (the “**Staff**”) of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (the “**Commission**”) of the Company’s intention to omit from its proxy statement and form of proxy (collectively, the “**2021 Proxy Materials**”) the stockholder proposal (the “**Proposal**”) and the statement in support thereof submitted by John Chevedden (the “**Representative**”) on behalf of Kenneth Steiner (the “**Proponent**”). A copy of the Proposal and the statement in support thereof is attached to this letter as Exhibit A. The Company respectfully requests that the Staff concur with the Company’s view that the Proposal may properly be excluded from the Company’s 2021 Proxy Materials pursuant to Rule 14a-8(f) because the Proponent has failed to satisfy the eligibility requirements of Rule 14a-8(b).

Pursuant to Rule 14a-8(j) under the Exchange Act, we have:

- filed this letter with the Commission no later than eighty (80) calendar days before the Company intends to file its definitive 2021 Proxy Materials with the Commission; and
- concurrently sent copies of this correspondence to the Representative on behalf of the Proponent.

Pursuant to Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14D (Nov. 7, 2008) ("**SLB 14D**"), we are submitting this request for no-action relief under Rule 14a-8 through the Commission's email address, [shareholderproposals@sec.gov](mailto:shareholderproposals@sec.gov) (in lieu of providing six additional copies of this letter pursuant to Rule 14a-8(j)), and the undersigned has included his name, telephone number and e-mail address both in this letter and the cover email accompanying this letter.

Rule 14a-8(k) under the Exchange Act and SLB 14D provide that shareholder proponents are required to send the company a copy of any correspondence that the proponents elect to submit to the Commission or Staff. Accordingly, we are taking this opportunity to inform the Proponent that if the Proponent or the Representative on the Proponent's behalf elects to submit additional correspondence to the Commission or Staff with respect to the Proposal, a copy of that correspondence should concurrently be furnished to the undersigned on behalf of the Company pursuant to Rule 14a-8(k) and SLB 14D.

#### **THE PROPOSAL**

The Proposal requests that the Company's stockholders approve the following resolution:

Shareholders request that our Board of Directors adopt as policy, and amend our governing documents as necessary, to require that the Chairman of the Board be an independent member of the Board whenever possible. Although it would be better to have an immediate transition to an independent Board Chairman, the Board would have the discretion to phase in this policy for the next Chief Executive Officer transition.

If the Board determines that a Chairman is no longer independent, the Board shall select a new Chairman who satisfies the requirements of the policy within a reasonable amount of time. Compliance with this policy is temporally waived in the unlikely event that no independent director is available and willing to serve as Chairman.

Again, a complete copy of the Proposal and supporting statement is attached to this letter as Exhibit A.

#### **BASIS FOR EXCLUSION**

The Company believes that the Proposal may properly be excluded from the 2021 Proxy Materials pursuant to Rule 14a-8(f) and as further addressed in Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14I (Nov. 7, 2017) ("**SLB 14I**") because the Proponent did not timely provide a response that identified the specific proposal to be submitted within 14 calendar days of receipt of the Deficiency Notice (as defined below). Since the Proponent has failed to satisfy the eligibility requirements of Rule 14a-8(b), the Proponent is ineligible to submit the Proposal for inclusion in the Company's the 2021 Proxy Materials.

### **PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND**

The Company received the Proposal on December 4, 2020 from the Representative via e-mail that purported to include the specific proposal submitted by the Proponent and delegation of authority to the Representative to submit such proposal. The Proposal was titled "Proposal [4] – Independent Board Chairman" and was accompanied by a letter from the Proponent (the "**Proponent's Initial Letter**") dated October 25, 2020, which included a handwritten note that it was revised on December 4, 2020. The Proponent's Initial Letter, among other things, named the Representative as the Proponent's proxy to submit a stockholder proposal on his behalf but did not expressly identify the specific proposal to be submitted. See Exhibit A.

Accordingly, as required by Rule 14a-8(f), the Company sent a notice of deficiency (the "**Deficiency Notice**," which is attached to this letter as Exhibit B) to the Representative on behalf of the Proponent by e-mail on December 11, 2020, which was within 14 calendar days of the Company's receipt of the Proposal. The Deficiency Notice specifically advised the Proponent of two deficiencies: (i) proof of ownership and (ii) identification of the specific proposal to be submitted. For proof of ownership, the Company advised the Proponent that in order to be eligible to submit a proposal, Rule 14a-8(b)(1) requires the Proponent to provide proof of ownership demonstrating that he has continuously held at least \$2,000 in market value, or 1%, of the Company's securities entitled to vote on the Proposal for at least one year through and including the date the Proposal was submitted. For identification of the specific proposal to be submitted, the Company advised the Proponent that under Rule 14a-8(b) and SLB 14I, the Proponent's Initial Letter purporting to authorize the Proponent to submit the Proposal by proxy and to act on his behalf did not identify the Proposal as the specific proposal to be submitted, thereby raising concerns referred to in SLB 14I that "the shareholders may not know that the proposals are being submitted on their behalf." A copy of Rule 14a-8, Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14F (Oct. 18, 2011) ("**SLB 14F**"), Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14G (Oct. 16, 2012) ("**SLB 14G**") and SLB 14I were enclosed for the Proponent's reference.

On December 18, 2020, within the required 14 calendar day timeframe, the Proponent provided a copy of a letter from TD Ameritrade, Inc. dated December 18, 2020 (attached to this letter as Exhibit C), which confirmed that the Proponent beneficially held the requisite number of shares of the Company continuously for at least one year as of the date of the submission of the Proposal.

On December 28, 2020, which was outside the required 14 calendar day timeframe, the Representative, on behalf of the Proponent, submitted a revised letter (the "**Proponent's Revised Letter**," which is attached to this letter as Exhibit D) to the Company via e-mail, intending to clarify the specific proposal to be submitted. The Proponent's Revised Letter added the title of the Proposal ("Proposal [4] – Independent Board Chairman") to the Proponent's Initial Letter. In addition, such letter was accompanied by a separate list of

stockholder proposal topics that the Representative was authorized to submit on behalf of the Proponent for the 2021 proxy season, which included “Independent Board Chair” as part of the authorized list of topics for submission.

#### ANALYSIS

***The Proposal May Be Excluded Under Rule 14a-8(b) and Rule 14a-8(f) because the Proponent has not Timely Provided Documentation Identifying the Specific Proposal to be Submitted to be Eligible to Submit a Proposal for Inclusion in the Company’s 2021 Proxy Materials for its Annual Meeting of Stockholders***

Pursuant to Rule 14a-8(f), a company may exclude a shareholder proposal from its proxy materials if such shareholder proposal fails to comply with the eligibility or procedural requirements under Rule 14a-8, provided that (i) the company has notified the proponent of such deficiencies within 14 calendar days of the company’s receipt of the proposal and (ii) the proponent has failed to correct such deficiencies within 14 calendar days of receipt of such notice.

On numerous occasions, the Staff has concurred with the exclusion of stockholder proposals based on a proponent’s failure to provide satisfactory evidence of eligibility under Rule 14a-8(b) and Rule 14a-8(f) within the required 14 calendar day time period, even when received one day, or a few days, after the deadline, and even if the evidence ultimately furnished otherwise satisfies Rule 14a-8(b). See, e.g., *FedEx Corp.* (Jun. 5, 2019) (one day late); *Anthem, Inc.* (Feb. 21, 2019) (seven days late); *AT&T Inc.* (Jan. 29, 2019) (three days late); *Dominion Energy, Inc.* (Dec. 17, 2018) (one day late), *Time Warner Inc.* (Mar. 13, 2018) (four days late); *Applied Materials, Inc.* (Nov. 23, 2016) (five days late); *FedEx Corporation* (Jul. 5, 2016) (four days late); *Prudential Financial, Inc.* (Dec. 28, 2015) (eight days late); and *Mondelēz International, Inc.* (Feb. 27, 2015) (two days late).

Further, in *Chevron Corporation* (Mar. 6, 2020) and *Exxon Mobil Corporation* (Mar. 6, 2020), the Staff concurred with the exclusion of shareholder proposals based on the proponent’s failure to provide satisfactory evidence of eligibility under Rule 14a-8(b) and Rule 14a-8(f) within the required 14 calendar day time period even if the 14 calendar day period “fell over Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Years,” indicating that time extensions would not be automatically granted solely because the 14 calendar day period included one or more holidays.

The Company sent its Deficiency Notice on December 11, 2020, which satisfied its obligation under Rule 14a-8 to timely send the Deficiency Notice within 14 calendar days of its receipt of the Proposal. The Deficiency Notice clearly advised the Proponent that a response addressing the deficiencies must be postmarked or transmitted electronically to the Company no later than 14 calendar days from the date of receipt of the Deficiency Notice. The 14 calendar day deadline for the Proponent to cure the deficiencies was December 25, 2020.

On December 18, 2020, within the required timeframe, the Proponent provided documentation satisfying the proof of ownership requirement. On December 28, 2020, 17 calendar days after receipt of the Deficiency Notice (or three days after the 14 calendar day deadline had passed), the Representative, on the Proponent's behalf, submitted the Proponent's Revised Letter that purported to identify the specific proposal to be submitted.

Consistent with the requirements under Rule 14a-8(f), the Company believes that it may exclude the Proposal from the 2021 Proxy Materials based on the Proponent's failure to timely provide documentation that it meets the eligibility requirements of Rule 14a-8(b) and correct the deficiency within the required 14 calendar day timeframe from when he received the Company's Deficiency Notice.

**CONCLUSION**

For the reasons discussed above, the Company respectfully requests the Staff's concurrence with its decision to omit the Proposal from the 2021 Proxy Materials and further requests the confirmation that the Staff will not recommend any enforcement action in connection with such omission.

In the event the Staff disagrees with any conclusion expressed herein, or should any information in support or explanation of the Company's position be required, we would appreciate an opportunity to confer with the Staff before issuance of its response. If the Staff has any questions regarding this request or requires additional information, please contact the undersigned at (401) 770-5409 or [Thomas.Moffatt@CVSHealth.com](mailto:Thomas.Moffatt@CVSHealth.com).

We appreciate your attention to this request.

Respectfully yours,



Thomas S. Moffatt  
Vice President, Assistant Secretary and Assistant General Counsel

cc: John Chevedden (on behalf of Kenneth Steiner)  
Colleen M. McIntosh, Senior Vice President, Chief Governance Officer, Corporate Secretary and Assistant General Counsel, CVS Health Corporation  
Lona Nallengara, Shearman & Sterling LLP

# **EXHIBIT A**

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**From:** John Chevedden \*\*\* >  
**Sent:** Friday, December 04, 2020 3:23 PM  
**To:** McIntosh, Colleen  
**Cc:** Moffatt, Thomas S.  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Rule 14a-8 Proposal (CVS)`` revised  
**Attachments:** 04122020\_4.pdf

\*\*\*\* External Email - Use Caution \*\*\*\*

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Dear Ms. McIntosh,

Please see the attached rule 14a-8 proposal to improve corporate governance and enhance long-term shareholder value at de minimis up-front cost – especially considering the substantial market capitalization of the company.

Sincerely,  
John Chevedden

Kenneth Steiner

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Ms. Colleen M. McIntosh  
CVS Caremark Corporation (CVS)  
One CVS Drive  
Woonsocket RI 02895  
PH: 401-765-1500

REVISED 04 DEC 2020

Dear Ms. McIntosh,

I purchased stock in our company because I believed our company had potential for improved performance. My attached Rule 14a-8 proposal is submitted in support of the long-term performance of our company. This Rule 14a-8 proposal is submitted as a low-cost method to improve company performance.

My proposal is for the next annual shareholder meeting. I will meet Rule 14a-8 requirements including the continuous ownership of the required stock value until after the date of the respective shareholder meeting. My submitted format, with the shareholder-supplied emphasis, is intended to be used for definitive proxy publication. This is my proxy for John Chevedden and/or his designee to forward this Rule 14a-8 proposal to the company and to act on my behalf regarding this Rule 14a-8 proposal, and/or modification of it, for the forthcoming shareholder meeting before, during and after the forthcoming shareholder meeting. Please direct all future communications regarding my rule 14a-8 proposal to John Chevedden

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at:

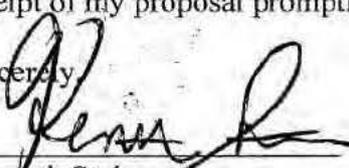
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to facilitate prompt and verifiable communications. Please identify this proposal as my proposal exclusively.

This letter does not cover proposals that are not rule 14a-8 proposals. This letter does not grant the power to vote. Your consideration and the consideration of the Board of Directors is appreciated in support of the long-term performance of our company. Please acknowledge receipt of my proposal promptly by email to

\*\*\*

Sincerely,

  
Kenneth Steiner

10-14-20  
Date

cc: Thomas Moffatt <TSMoffatt@cv.com>  
FX: 401-216-3758  
FX: 401-765-7887

[CVS – Rule 14a-8 Proposal, October 25, 2020 | Revised December 4, 2020]

[This line and any line above it – *Not* for publication.]

**Proposal 4 – Independent Board Chairman**

Shareholders request that our Board of Directors adopt as policy, and amend our governing documents as necessary, to require that the Chairman of the Board be an independent member of the Board whenever possible. Although it would be better to have an immediate transition to an independent Board Chairman, the Board would have the discretion to phase in this policy for the next Chief Executive Officer transition.

If the Board determines that a Chairman is no longer independent, the Board shall select a new Chairman who satisfies the requirements of the policy within a reasonable amount of time. Compliance with this policy is temporally waived in the unlikely event that no independent director is available and willing to serve as Chairman.

The timing may be right for a new CVS Chairman of the Board and a transition to a permanent independent Board Chairman. The current CVS Chairman, Mr. David Dorman, has 14-years long-tenure and was again rejected by more shareholders than any other CVS director in 2020.

Meanwhile the CVS stock price fell from \$110 in 2015. Plus CVS management forced CVS shareholders to pay for advertising against this proposal topic in 2020.

CVS management pay was also rejected by an overwhelming 75% of shares in 2020 which, which combined with the deflated price of CVS stock, suggests that CVS management pay does not have the proper incentives.

Mr. David Brown, who chaired the CVS management pay committee, received the second highest votes of rejection after Mr. Dorman. Plus CVS management failed to announce this high percentage rejection of management pay during the 2020 online annual meeting and the high votes of rejection regarding Mr. Dorman and Mr. Brown.

The Department of Justice announcement of an \$8 Billion Global Settlement with Purdue Pharma puts pressure on pharmacies that sold opioids like CVS.

Please vote yes:

**Independent Board Chairman – Proposal 4**

[The line above – *Is* for publication. Please assign the correct proposal number in the 2 places.]

Notes:

This proposal is believed to conform with Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14B (CF), September 15, 2004 including (emphasis added):

Accordingly, going forward, we believe that it would not be appropriate for companies to exclude supporting statement language and/or an entire proposal in reliance on rule 14a-8(l)(3) in the following circumstances:

- the company objects to factual assertions because they are not supported;
- the company objects to factual assertions that, while not materially false or misleading, may be disputed or countered;
- the company objects to factual assertions because those assertions may be interpreted by shareholders in a manner that is unfavorable to the company, its directors, or its officers; and/or
- the company objects to statements because they represent the opinion of the shareholder proponent or a referenced source, but the statements are not identified specifically as such.

**We believe that it is appropriate under rule 14a-8 for companies to address these objections in their statements of opposition.**

See also: Sun Microsystems, Inc. (July 21, 2005).

The stock supporting this proposal will be held until after the annual meeting and the proposal will be presented at the annual meeting. Please acknowledge this proposal promptly by email

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The graphic below is intended to be published with the rule 14a-8 proposal.

The graphic is to be the same size as the largest management graphic (and accompanying bold or highlighted management text with a graphic) or any highlighted management executive summary used in conjunction with a management proposal or a rule 14a-8 shareholder proposal in the 2021 proxy.

The proponent is willing to discuss the in unison elimination of both shareholder graphic and management graphic in the proxy in regard to specific proposals.



**FOR**



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**From:** John Chevedden \*\*\* >  
**Sent:** Friday, December 04, 2020 10:12 PM  
**To:** McIntosh, Colleen  
**Cc:** Moffatt, Thomas S.  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Rule 14a-8 Center Justified Proposal Graphic (CVS) Kenneth Steiner Proposal

\*\*\*\* External Email - Use Caution \*\*\*\*

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Dear Ms. McIntosh,

This is a better copy of the center justified graphic (for proxy publication) included with the rule 14a-8 proposal. The graphic is to be published just below the top title of the rule 14a-8 proposal.

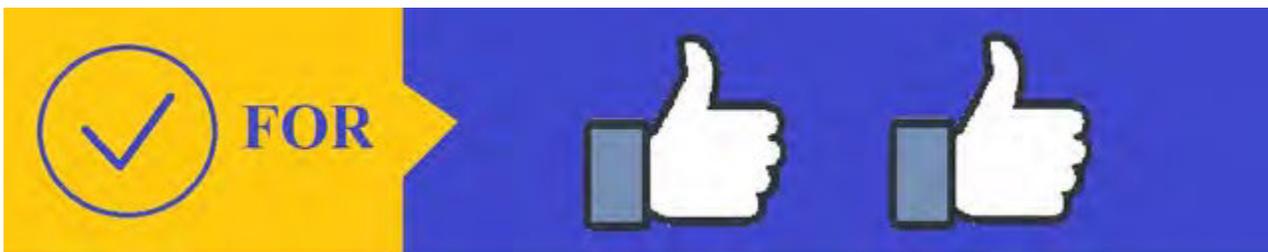
Sincerely,  
John Chevedden

The graphic below is intended to be published with the rule 14a-8 proposal.

The graphic is to be the same size as the largest management graphic (and accompanying bold or highlighted management text with a graphic) or any highlighted management executive summary used in conjunction with a management proposal or a rule 14a-8 shareholder proposal in the 2021 proxy.

The proponent is willing to discuss the in unison elimination of both shareholder graphic and management graphic in the proxy in regard to specific proposals.

[16] Companies should not minimize or otherwise diminish the appearance of a shareholder's graphic. For example, if the company includes its own graphics in its proxy statement, it should give similar prominence to a shareholder's graphics. If a company's proxy statement appears in black and white, however, the shareholder proposal and accompanying graphics may also appear in black and white.



# **EXHIBIT B**

**Gina Lee**

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**From:** Moffatt, Thomas S. <Thomas.Moffatt@CVSHealth.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, December 11, 2020 4:31 PM  
**To:** John Chevedden  
**Subject:** RE: [EXTERNAL] Rule 14a-8 Proposal (CVS)`` revised  
**Attachments:** SLB 14G.pdf; SLB 14I.pdf

[Attachments 3 and 4.](#)

Tom Moffatt

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**From:** Moffatt, Thomas S. <Thomas.Moffatt@CVSHealth.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, December 11, 2020 4:30 PM  
**To:** \*\*\*  
**Subject:** RE: [EXTERNAL] Rule 14a-8 Proposal (CVS)`` revised  
**Attachments:** Rule 14a-8.pdf; SLB 14F.pdf

[Attachments 1 and 2.](#)

Tom Moffatt

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**From:** Moffatt, Thomas S. <Thomas.Moffatt@CVSHealth.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, December 11, 2020 4:29 PM  
**To:** \*\*\*  
**Subject:** FW: [EXTERNAL] Rule 14a-8 Proposal (CVS)`` revised  
**Attachments:** Ltr. J. Chevedden (K. Steiner).pdf

Dear Mr. Chevedden:

I am resending this because I got an error message saying the file was too large. I am therefore sending the attachments separately.

Tom Moffatt

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**From:** Moffatt, Thomas S.  
**Sent:** Friday, December 11, 2020 4:21 PM  
**To:** John Chevedden <\*\*\*>; McIntosh, Colleen <Colleen.Mcintosh@CVSHealth.com>  
**Subject:** RE: [EXTERNAL] Rule 14a-8 Proposal (CVS)`` revised

Dear Mr. Chevedden:

Please see attached.

Best regards,

Tom Moffatt

**Tom Moffatt** | Vice President, Asst. Secretary & Asst. General Counsel - Corporate Services | **direct** 401-770-5409 | **cell** 401-499-4102 | **fax** 401-216-3758 | CVS Health | One CVS Drive | MC1160 | Woonsocket, RI 02895 | [thomas.moffatt@cvshealth.com](mailto:thomas.moffatt@cvshealth.com)



CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This communication and any attachments may contain confidential and/or privileged information for the use of the designated recipients named above. If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that you have received this communication in error and that any review, disclosure, dissemination, distribution or copying of it or its contents is prohibited. If you have received this communication in error, please notify the sender immediately by email or telephone and destroy all copies of this communication and any attachments. Thank you.

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**From:** John Chevedden [[mailto:\\*\\*\\*](mailto:***)] ]  
**Sent:** Friday, December 4, 2020 3:23 PM  
**To:** McIntosh, Colleen <[Colleen.Mcintosh@CVSHealth.com](mailto:Colleen.Mcintosh@CVSHealth.com)>  
**Cc:** Moffatt, Thomas S. <[Thomas.Moffatt@CVSHealth.com](mailto:Thomas.Moffatt@CVSHealth.com)>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Rule 14a-8 Proposal (CVS)`` revised

\*\*\*\* External Email - Use Caution \*\*\*\*

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Dear Ms. McIntosh,

Please see the attached rule 14a-8 proposal to improve corporate governance and enhance long-term shareholder value at de minimis up-front cost – especially considering the substantial market capitalization of the company.

Sincerely,  
John Chevedden



**Thomas S. Moffatt**  
Vice President, Asst. Secretary &  
Asst. General Counsel

One CVS Drive  
MC 1160  
Woonsocket, RI 02895

p 401-770-5409  
f 401-216-3758

thomas.moffatt@cvshhealth.com

December 11, 2020

Mr. John Chevedden  
\*\*\*

Via email: \*\*\*

Re: CVS Health Corporation  
Stockholder Proposal – Independent Board Chairman

Dear Mr. Chevedden:

We received the stockholder proposal that is on its face dated October 25, 2020 and revised December 4, 2020 (the "Proposal"), that was purportedly submitted on behalf of Mr. Kenneth Steiner (the "Proponent") and actually submitted to CVS Health Corporation ("CVS Health" or the "Company") on December 4, 2020.

The Proposal contains certain procedural deficiencies, which Securities and Exchange Commission ("SEC") regulations require us to bring to your attention.

### **Proof of Ownership**

Rule 14a-8(b)(1) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended (the "Exchange Act"), requires that in order to be eligible to submit a proposal for inclusion in CVS Health's proxy statement for its 2021 annual meeting of stockholders (the "annual meeting"), each stockholder proponent must, among other things, have continuously held at least \$2,000 in market value, or 1%, of CVS Health's common stock for at least one year prior to the date the proponent submits the proposal, and must continue to hold such common stock through the date of CVS Health's annual meeting. Our stock records indicate that the Proponent is not currently the registered holder of any shares of CVS Health's common stock and has not provided proof of ownership of CVS Health's common stock.

Accordingly, Rule 14a-8(b) requires that a proponent of a proposal prove eligibility as a beneficial stockholder of the company that is the subject of the proposal by submitting either:

- a written statement from the "record" holder of the shares (usually a bank or broker) verifying that, at the time the proponent submitted the Proposal, the proponent had continuously held at least \$2,000 in market value, or 1%, of CVS Health's common stock for at least the one-year period prior to and including the date the Proposal was submitted, and that the proponent intend to continue to hold such common stock through the date of CVS Health's annual meeting; or

- a copy of a filed Schedule 13D, Schedule 13G, Form 3, Form 4, Form 5, or amendments to those documents or updated forms, reflecting the proponent's ownership of shares as of or before the date on which the one-year eligibility period begins, the proponent's written statement that it has continuously held the required number of shares for the one-year period as of the date of the statement and the proponent's written statement that the proponent intends to continue ownership of the shares through the date of CVS Health's annual meeting.

Your letter did not include sufficient proof of the Proponent's ownership of CVS Health's common stock. By this letter, I am requesting that you provide to us acceptable documentation that the Proponent has held the required value or number of shares to submit a proposal continuously for at least the one-year period preceding and including the December 4, 2020 date the Proposal was submitted.

To help stockholders comply with the requirements when submitting proof of ownership to companies, the SEC's Division of Corporation Finance (the "Division") published Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14F ("SLB 14F"), dated October 18, 2011, and Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14G ("SLB 14G"), dated October 16, 2012, a copy of both of which are attached for your reference. SLB 14F and SLB 14G provide that for securities held through The Depository Trust Company ("DTC"), only DTC participants should be viewed as "record" holders of securities that are deposited at DTC. The Proponent can confirm whether its bank or broker is a DTC participant by checking DTC's participant list, which is currently available on the Internet at: <https://www.dtcc.com/client-center/dtc-directories>.

If the Proponent holds shares through a bank or broker that is not a DTC participant, it will need to obtain proof of ownership from the DTC participant through which the bank or broker holds the shares, or an affiliate of such DTC participant. The Proponent should be able to find the name of the DTC participant by asking its bank or broker. If the DTC participant that holds the Proponent's shares knows the holdings of its bank or broker, but does not know the Proponent's holdings, the Proponent may satisfy the proof of ownership requirements by submitting two proof of ownership statements — one from the Proponent's bank or broker confirming its ownership and the other from the DTC participant confirming the bank's or broker's ownership. Please review SLB 14F carefully before submitting proof of ownership to ensure that it is compliant.

Copies of Rule 14a-8, which applies to stockholder proposals submitted for inclusion in proxy statements, and SLB 14F and SLB 14G, which applies to stockholders' compliance with requirements when submitting proof of ownership to companies, are enclosed for your reference.

#### **Identification of the Specific Proposal to be Submitted**

Separately, your correspondence did not include sufficient documentation demonstrating that you had the legal authority to submit the Proposal on behalf of the Proponent as of the date the Proposal was submitted (December 4, 2020). In Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14I (Nov. 1, 2017) ("SLB 14I"), a copy of which is attached for your reference, the Division noted that proposals submitted by proxy, such as the Proposal, may present challenges and concerns, including "that shareholders may not know that proposals are being submitted on their behalf."

Accordingly, in evaluating whether there is a basis to exclude a proposal under the eligibility requirements of Rule 14a-8(b) of the Exchange Act, as addressed below, SLB 14I states that in general the Division would expect any shareholder who submits a proposal by proxy to provide documentation to:

- identify the shareholder-proponent and the person or entity selected as proxy;
- identify the company to which the proposal is directed;
- identify the annual or special meeting for which the proposal is submitted;
- identify the specific proposal to be submitted; and
- be signed and dated by the shareholder.

The documentation that you provided with the Proposal raises the concerns referred to in SLB 14I. Specifically, the documentation from the Proponent purporting to authorize you to act on the Proponent's behalf does not identify the Proposal as the specific proposal to be submitted.

To remedy this defect, the Proponent should provide documentation that confirms that, as of the date you submitted the Proposal, the Proponent had instructed or authorized you to submit the Proposal to the Company on the Proponent's behalf. Such documentation should identify the specific proposal authorized to be submitted and expressly identify the Company as the subject company of the Proposal.

A copy of SLB 14I, which applies to "proposals by proxy", is enclosed for your reference.

In order to meet the eligibility requirements for submitting a stockholder proposal, the SEC rules require that the documentation be postmarked or transmitted electronically to us no later than 14 calendar days from the date you receive this letter. Please address any response to me at [Thomas.Moffatt@CVSHealth.com](mailto:Thomas.Moffatt@CVSHealth.com).

Sincerely,



Thomas S. Moffatt  
Vice President, Assistant Secretary and Assistant General Counsel

#### Attachments

cc w/ att: Colleen M. McIntosh, Senior Vice President, Secretary and  
Chief Governance Officer, CVS Health Corporation  
Lona Nallengara, Shearman & Sterling LLP

## 17 CFR § 240.14a-8 - Shareholder proposals.

CFR Table of Popular Names

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### § 240.14a-8 Shareholder proposals.

Link to an amendment published at [85 FR 70294](#), Nov. 4, 2020.

This [section](#) addresses when a company must include a shareholder's proposal in its [proxy statement](#) and identify the proposal in its form of [proxy](#) when the company holds an annual or special meeting of shareholders. In summary, in order to have your shareholder proposal included on a company's [proxy card](#), and included along with any supporting statement in its [proxy statement](#), you must be eligible and follow certain procedures. Under a few specific circumstances, the company is permitted to exclude your proposal, but only after submitting its reasons to the Commission. We structured this [section](#) in a question-and-answer format so that it is easier to understand. The references to "you" are to a shareholder seeking to submit the proposal.

**(a) Question 1:** What is a proposal? A shareholder proposal is your recommendation or requirement that the company and/or its board of directors take [action](#), which you intend to present at a meeting of the company's shareholders. Your proposal should state as clearly as possible the course of [action](#) that you believe the company should follow. If your proposal is placed on the company's [proxy card](#), the company must also provide in the form of [proxy](#) means for shareholders to specify by boxes a choice between approval or disapproval, or abstention. Unless otherwise indicated, the word "proposal" as used in this [section](#) refers both to your proposal, and to your corresponding statement in support of your proposal (if any).

**(b) Question 2:** Who is eligible to submit a proposal, and how do I demonstrate to the company that I am eligible? (1) In order to be eligible to submit a proposal, you must have continuously held at least \$2,000 in market value, or 1%, of the company's securities entitled to be voted on the proposal at the meeting for at least one year by the date you submit the proposal. You must continue to hold those securities through the date of the meeting.

**(2)** If you are the registered holder of your securities, which means that your name appears in the company's records as a shareholder, the company can verify your eligibility on its own, although you will still have to provide the company with a written statement that you intend to continue to hold the securities through the date of the meeting of shareholders. However, if like many shareholders you are not a registered holder, the company likely does not know that you are a shareholder, or how many shares you own. In this case, at the time you submit your proposal, you must prove your eligibility to the company in one of two ways:

**(i)** The first way is to submit to the company a written statement from the "record" holder of your securities (usually a broker or bank) verifying that, at the time you submitted your proposal, you continuously held the securities for at least one year. You must also include your own written statement that you intend to continue to hold the securities through the date of the meeting of shareholders; or

**(ii)** The second way to prove ownership applies only if you have filed a Schedule 13D (§ 240.13d-101), Schedule 13G (§ 240.13d-102), Form 3 (§ 249.103 of this chapter), Form 4 (§ 249.104 of this chapter) and/or Form 5 (§ 249.105 of this chapter), or amendments to those documents or updated forms, reflecting your ownership of the shares as of or before the date on which the one-year eligibility period begins. If you have filed one of these documents with the SEC, you may demonstrate your eligibility by submitting to the company:

**(A)** A copy of the schedule and/or form, and any subsequent amendments reporting a change in your ownership level;

**(B)** Your written statement that you continuously held the required number of shares for the one-year period as of the date of the statement; and

**(C)** Your written statement that you intend to continue ownership of the shares through the date of the company's annual or special meeting.

**(c) Question 3:** How many proposals may I submit? Each shareholder may submit no more than one proposal to a company for a particular shareholders' meeting.

**(d) Question 4:** How long can my proposal be? The proposal, including any accompanying supporting statement, may not exceed 500 words.

**(e) Question 5:** What is the deadline for submitting a proposal? (1) If you are submitting your proposal for the company's annual meeting, you can in most cases find the deadline in last year's proxy statement. However, if the

company did not hold an annual meeting last year, or has changed the date of its meeting for this year more than 30 days from last year's meeting, you can usually find the deadline in one of the company's quarterly reports on Form 10-Q (§ 249.308a of this chapter), or in shareholder reports of investment companies under § 270.30d-1 of this chapter of the Investment Company Act of 1940. In order to avoid controversy, shareholders should submit their proposals by means, including electronic means, that permit them to prove the date of delivery.

**(2)** The deadline is calculated in the following manner if the proposal is submitted for a regularly scheduled annual meeting. The proposal must be received at the company's principal executive offices not less than 120 calendar days before the date of the company's proxy statement released to shareholders in connection with the previous year's annual meeting. However, if the company did not hold an annual meeting the previous year, or if the date of this year's annual meeting has been changed by more than 30 days from the date of the previous year's meeting, then the deadline is a reasonable time before the company begins to print and send its proxy materials.

**(3)** If you are submitting your proposal for a meeting of shareholders other than a regularly scheduled annual meeting, the deadline is a reasonable time before the company begins to print and send its proxy materials.

**(f) Question 6:** What if I fail to follow one of the eligibility or procedural requirements explained in answers to Questions 1 through 4 of this section?

(1) The company may exclude your proposal, but only after it has notified you of the problem, and you have failed adequately to correct it. Within 14 calendar days of receiving your proposal, the company must notify you in writing of any procedural or eligibility deficiencies, as well as of the time frame for your response. Your response must be postmarked, or transmitted electronically, no later than 14 days from the date you received the company's notification. A company need not provide you such notice of a deficiency if the deficiency cannot be remedied, such as if you fail to submit a proposal by the company's properly determined deadline. If the company intends to exclude the proposal, it will later have to make a submission under § 240.14a-8 and provide you with a copy under Question 10 below, § 240.14a-8(j).

**(2)** If you fail in your promise to hold the required number of securities through the date of the meeting of shareholders, then the company will be permitted to exclude all of your proposals from its proxy materials for any meeting held in the following two calendar years.

**(g) Question 7:** Who has the burden of persuading the Commission or its staff that my proposal can be excluded? Except as otherwise noted, the burden is on the company to demonstrate that it is entitled to exclude a proposal.

**(h) Question 8:** Must I appear personally at the shareholders' meeting to present the proposal? (1) Either you, or your representative who is qualified under state law to present the proposal on your behalf, must attend the meeting to present the proposal. Whether you attend the meeting yourself or send a qualified representative to the meeting in your place, you should make sure that you, or your representative, follow the proper state law procedures for attending the meeting and/or presenting your proposal.

**(2)** If the company holds its shareholder meeting in whole or in part via electronic media, and the company permits you or your representative to present your proposal via such media, then you may appear through electronic media rather than traveling to the meeting to appear in person.

**(3)** If you or your qualified representative fail to appear and present the proposal, without good cause, the company will be permitted to exclude all of your proposals from its proxy materials for any meetings held in the following two calendar years.

**(i) Question 9:** If I have complied with the procedural requirements, on what other bases may a company rely to exclude my proposal? (1) Improper under state law: If the proposal is not a proper subject for action by shareholders under the laws of the jurisdiction of the company's organization;

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**NOTE TO PARAGRAPH (I)(1):**

Depending on the subject matter, some proposals are not considered proper under state law if they would be binding on the company if approved by shareholders. In our experience, most proposals that are cast as recommendations or requests that the board of directors take specified action are proper under state law. Accordingly, we will assume that a proposal drafted as a recommendation or suggestion is proper unless the company demonstrates otherwise.

**(2) Violation of law:** If the proposal would, if implemented, cause the company to violate any state, federal, or foreign law to which it is subject;

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**NOTE TO PARAGRAPH (I)(2):**

We will not apply this basis for exclusion to permit exclusion of a proposal on grounds that it would violate foreign law if compliance with the foreign law would result in a violation of any state or federal law.

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**(3) Violation of proxy rules:** If the proposal or supporting statement is contrary to any of the Commission's proxy rules, including § 240.14a-9, which prohibits materially false or misleading statements in proxy soliciting materials;

**(4) Personal grievance; special interest:** If the proposal relates to the redress of a personal claim or grievance against the company or any other person, or if it is designed to result in a benefit to you, or to further a personal interest, which is not shared by the other shareholders at large;

**(5) Relevance:** If the proposal relates to operations which account for less than 5 percent of the company's total assets at the end of its most recent fiscal year, and for less than 5 percent of its net earnings and gross sales for its most recent fiscal year, and is not otherwise significantly related to the company's business;

**(6) Absence of power/authority:** If the company would lack the power or authority to implement the proposal;

**(7) Management functions:** If the proposal deals with a matter relating to the company's ordinary business operations;

**(8) Director elections:** If the proposal:

(i) Would disqualify a nominee who is standing for election;

(ii) Would remove a director from office before his or her term expired;

(iii) Questions the competence, business judgment, or character of one or more nominees or directors;

(iv) Seeks to include a specific individual in the company's proxy materials for election to the board of directors; or

(v) Otherwise could affect the outcome of the upcoming election of directors.

**(9) Conflicts with company's proposal:** If the proposal directly conflicts with one of the company's own proposals to be submitted to shareholders at the same meeting;

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**NOTE TO PARAGRAPH (I)(9):**

A company's submission to the Commission under this section should specify the points of conflict with the company's proposal.

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**(10) Substantially implemented:** If the company has already substantially implemented the proposal;

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**NOTE TO PARAGRAPH (I)(10):**

A company may exclude a shareholder proposal that would provide an advisory vote or seek future advisory votes to approve the compensation of executives as disclosed pursuant to Item 402 of Regulation S-K (§ 229.402 of this chapter) or any successor to Item 402 (a "say-on-pay vote") or that relates to the frequency of say-on-pay votes, provided that in the most recent shareholder vote required by § 240.14a-21(b) of this chapter a single year (*i.e.*, one, two, or three years) received approval of a majority of votes cast on the matter and the company has adopted a policy on the frequency of say-on-pay votes that is consistent with the choice of the majority of votes cast in the most recent shareholder vote required by § 240.14a-21(b) of this chapter.

**(11) Duplication:** If the proposal substantially duplicates another proposal previously submitted to the company by another proponent that will be included in the company's proxy materials for the same meeting;

**(12) Resubmissions:** If the proposal deals with substantially the same subject matter as another proposal or proposals that has or have been previously included in the company's proxy materials within the preceding 5 calendar years, a company may exclude it from its proxy materials for any meeting held within 3 calendar years of the last time it was included if the proposal received:

(i) Less than 3% of the vote if proposed once within the preceding 5 calendar years;

(ii) Less than 6% of the vote on its last submission to shareholders if proposed twice previously within the preceding 5 calendar years; or

(iii) Less than 10% of the vote on its last submission to shareholders if proposed three times or more previously within the preceding 5 calendar years; and

**(13) Specific amount of dividends:** If the proposal relates to specific amounts of cash or stock dividends.

**(j) Question 10:** What procedures must the company follow if it intends to exclude my proposal? (1) If the company intends to exclude a proposal from its proxy materials, it must file its reasons with the Commission no later than 80 calendar days before it files its definitive proxy statement and form of proxy with the Commission. The company must simultaneously provide you with a copy of its submission. The Commission staff may permit the company

to make its submission later than 80 days before the company files its definitive proxy statement and form of proxy, if the company demonstrates good cause for missing the deadline.

**(2)** The company must file six paper copies of the following:

**(i)** The proposal;

**(ii)** An explanation of why the company believes that it may exclude the proposal, which should, if possible, refer to the most recent applicable authority, such as prior Division letters issued under the rule; and

**(iii)** A supporting opinion of counsel when such reasons are based on matters of state or foreign law.

**(k) Question 11:** May I submit my own statement to the Commission responding to the company's arguments?

Yes, you may submit a response, but it is not required. You should try to submit any response to us, with a copy to the company, as soon as possible after the company makes its submission. This way, the Commission staff will have time to consider fully your submission before it issues its response. You should submit six paper copies of your response.

**(l) Question 12:** If the company includes my shareholder proposal in its proxy materials, what information about me must it include along with the proposal itself?

**(1)** The company's proxy statement must include your name and address, as well as the number of the company's voting securities that you hold. However, instead of providing that information, the company may instead include a statement that it will provide the information to shareholders promptly upon receiving an oral or written request.

**(2)** The company is not responsible for the contents of your proposal or supporting statement.

**(m) Question 13:** What can I do if the company includes in its proxy statement reasons why it believes shareholders should not vote in favor of my proposal, and I disagree with some of its statements?

**(1)** The company may elect to include in its proxy statement reasons why it believes shareholders should vote against your proposal. The company is allowed to make arguments reflecting its own point of view, just as you may express your own point of view in your proposal's supporting statement.

**(2)** However, if you believe that the company's opposition to your proposal contains materially false or misleading statements that may violate our anti-fraud rule, § 240.14a-9, you should promptly send to the Commission staff and the company a letter explaining the reasons for your view, along with a copy of the company's statements opposing your proposal. To the extent possible, your letter should include specific factual information demonstrating the inaccuracy of the company's claims. Time permitting, you may wish to try to work out your differences with the company by yourself before contacting the Commission staff.

**(3)** We require the company to send you a copy of its statements opposing your proposal before it sends its proxy materials, so that you may bring to our attention any materially false or misleading statements, under the following timeframes:

**(i)** If our no-action response requires that you make revisions to your proposal or supporting statement as a condition to requiring the company to include it in its proxy materials, then the company must provide you with a copy of its opposition statements no later than 5 calendar days after the company receives a copy of your revised proposal; or

**(ii)** In all other cases, the company must provide you with a copy of its opposition statements no later than 30 calendar days before its files definitive copies of its proxy statement and form of proxy under § 240.14a-6.

[63 FR 29119, May 28, 1998; 63 FR 50622, 50623, Sept. 22, 1998, as amended at 72 FR 4168, Jan. 29, 2007; 72 FR 70456, Dec. 11, 2007; 73 FR 977, Jan. 4, 2008; 76 FR 6045, Feb. 2, 2011; 75 FR 56782, Sept. 16, 2010]

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## U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission

### Division of Corporation Finance Securities and Exchange Commission

## Shareholder Proposals

### Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14F (CF)

**Action:** Publication of CF Staff Legal Bulletin

**Date:** October 18, 2011

**Summary:** This staff legal bulletin provides information for companies and shareholders regarding Rule 14a-8 under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934.

**Supplementary Information:** The statements in this bulletin represent the views of the Division of Corporation Finance (the "Division"). This bulletin is not a rule, regulation or statement of the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "Commission"). Further, the Commission has neither approved nor disapproved its content.

**Contacts:** For further information, please contact the Division's Office of Chief Counsel by calling (202) 551-3500 or by submitting a web-based request form at [https://www.sec.gov/forms/corp\\_fin\\_interpretive](https://www.sec.gov/forms/corp_fin_interpretive).

#### A. The purpose of this bulletin

This bulletin is part of a continuing effort by the Division to provide guidance on important issues arising under Exchange Act Rule 14a-8. Specifically, this bulletin contains information regarding:

- Brokers and banks that constitute "record" holders under Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i) for purposes of verifying whether a beneficial owner is eligible to submit a proposal under Rule 14a-8;
- Common errors shareholders can avoid when submitting proof of ownership to companies;
- The submission of revised proposals;
- Procedures for withdrawing no-action requests regarding proposals submitted by multiple proponents; and
- The Division's new process for transmitting Rule 14a-8 no-action responses by email.

You can find additional guidance regarding Rule 14a-8 in the following bulletins that are available on the Commission's website: [SLB No. 14](#), [SLB No. 14A](#), [SLB No. 14B](#), [SLB No. 14C](#), [SLB No. 14D](#) and [SLB No. 14E](#).

#### B. The types of brokers and banks that constitute "record" holders under Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i) for purposes of verifying whether a beneficial owner is eligible to submit a proposal under Rule 14a-8

##### 1. Eligibility to submit a proposal under Rule 14a-8

To be eligible to submit a shareholder proposal, a shareholder must have continuously held at least \$2,000 in market value, or 1%, of the company's securities entitled to be voted on the proposal at the shareholder meeting for at least one year as of the date the shareholder submits the proposal. The shareholder must also continue to hold the required amount of securities through the date of the meeting and must provide the company with a written statement of intent to do so.<sup>1</sup>

The steps that a shareholder must take to verify his or her eligibility to submit a proposal depend on how the shareholder owns the securities. There are two types of security holders in the U.S.: registered owners and beneficial owners.<sup>2</sup> Registered owners have a direct relationship with the issuer because their ownership of shares is listed on the records maintained by the issuer or its transfer agent. If a shareholder is a registered owner, the company can independently confirm that the shareholder's holdings satisfy Rule 14a-8(b)'s eligibility requirement.

The vast majority of investors in shares issued by U.S. companies, however, are beneficial owners, which means that they hold their securities in book-entry form through a securities intermediary, such as a broker or a bank. Beneficial owners are sometimes referred to as "street name" holders. Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i) provides that a beneficial owner can provide proof of ownership to support his or her eligibility to submit a proposal by submitting a written statement "from the 'record' holder of [the] securities (usually a broker or bank)," verifying that, at the time the proposal was submitted, the shareholder held the required amount of securities continuously for at least one year.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. The role of the Depository Trust Company**

Most large U.S. brokers and banks deposit their customers' securities with, and hold those securities through, the Depository Trust Company ("DTC"), a registered clearing agency acting as a securities depository. Such brokers and banks are often referred to as "participants" in DTC.<sup>4</sup> The names of these DTC participants, however, do not appear as the registered owners of the securities deposited with DTC on the list of shareholders maintained by the company or, more typically, by its transfer agent. Rather, DTC's nominee, Cede & Co., appears on the shareholder list as the sole registered owner of securities deposited with DTC by the DTC participants. A company can request from DTC a "securities position listing" as of a specified date, which identifies the DTC participants having a position in the company's securities and the number of securities held by each DTC participant on that date.<sup>5</sup>

## **3. Brokers and banks that constitute "record" holders under Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i) for purposes of verifying whether a beneficial owner is eligible to submit a proposal under Rule 14a-8**

In *The Hain Celestial Group, Inc.* (Oct. 1, 2008), we took the position that an introducing broker could be considered a "record" holder for purposes of Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i). An introducing broker is a broker that engages in sales and other activities involving customer contact, such as opening customer accounts and accepting customer orders, but is not permitted to maintain custody of customer funds and securities.<sup>6</sup> Instead, an introducing broker engages another broker, known as a "clearing broker," to hold custody of client funds and securities, to clear and execute customer trades, and to handle other functions such as issuing confirmations of customer trades and customer account statements. Clearing brokers generally are DTC participants; introducing brokers generally are not. As introducing brokers generally are not DTC participants, and therefore typically do not appear on DTC's securities position listing, *Hain Celestial* has required companies to

accept proof of ownership letters from brokers in cases where, unlike the positions of registered owners and brokers and banks that are DTC participants, the company is unable to verify the positions against its own or its transfer agent's records or against DTC's securities position listing.

In light of questions we have received following two recent court cases relating to proof of ownership under Rule 14a-8<sup>7</sup> and in light of the Commission's discussion of registered and beneficial owners in the Proxy Mechanics Concept Release, we have reconsidered our views as to what types of brokers and banks should be considered "record" holders under Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i). Because of the transparency of DTC participants' positions in a company's securities, we will take the view going forward that, for Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i) purposes, only DTC participants should be viewed as "record" holders of securities that are deposited at DTC. As a result, we will no longer follow *Hain Celestial*.

We believe that taking this approach as to who constitutes a "record" holder for purposes of Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i) will provide greater certainty to beneficial owners and companies. We also note that this approach is consistent with Exchange Act Rule 12g5-1 and a 1988 staff no-action letter addressing that rule,<sup>8</sup> under which brokers and banks that are DTC participants are considered to be the record holders of securities on deposit with DTC when calculating the number of record holders for purposes of Sections 12(g) and 15(d) of the Exchange Act.

Companies have occasionally expressed the view that, because DTC's nominee, Cede & Co., appears on the shareholder list as the sole registered owner of securities deposited with DTC by the DTC participants, only DTC or Cede & Co. should be viewed as the "record" holder of the securities held on deposit at DTC for purposes of Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i). We have never interpreted the rule to require a shareholder to obtain a proof of ownership letter from DTC or Cede & Co., and nothing in this guidance should be construed as changing that view.

*How can a shareholder determine whether his or her broker or bank is a DTC participant?*

Shareholders and companies can confirm whether a particular broker or bank is a DTC participant by checking DTC's participant list, which is currently available on the Internet at <http://www.dtcc.com/~media/Files/Downloads/client-center/DTC/alpha.ashx>.

*What if a shareholder's broker or bank is not on DTC's participant list?*

The shareholder will need to obtain proof of ownership from the DTC participant through which the securities are held. The shareholder should be able to find out who this DTC participant is by asking the shareholder's broker or bank.<sup>9</sup>

If the DTC participant knows the shareholder's broker or bank's holdings, but does not know the shareholder's holdings, a shareholder could satisfy Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i) by obtaining and submitting two proof of ownership statements verifying that, at the time the proposal was submitted, the required amount of securities were continuously held for at least one year – one from the shareholder's broker or bank confirming the shareholder's ownership, and the other from the DTC participant confirming the broker or bank's ownership.

*How will the staff process no-action requests that argue for exclusion on the basis that the shareholder's proof of ownership is not from a DTC*

*participant?*

The staff will grant no-action relief to a company on the basis that the shareholder's proof of ownership is not from a DTC participant only if the company's notice of defect describes the required proof of ownership in a manner that is consistent with the guidance contained in this bulletin. Under Rule 14a-8(f)(1), the shareholder will have an opportunity to obtain the requisite proof of ownership after receiving the notice of defect.

### **C. Common errors shareholders can avoid when submitting proof of ownership to companies**

In this section, we describe two common errors shareholders make when submitting proof of ownership for purposes of Rule 14a-8(b)(2), and we provide guidance on how to avoid these errors.

First, Rule 14a-8(b) requires a shareholder to provide proof of ownership that he or she has "continuously held at least \$2,000 in market value, or 1%, of the company's securities entitled to be voted on the proposal at the meeting for at least one year by the date you submit the proposal" (emphasis added).<sup>10</sup> We note that many proof of ownership letters do not satisfy this requirement because they do not verify the shareholder's beneficial ownership for the entire one-year period preceding and including the date the proposal is submitted. In some cases, the letter speaks as of a date *before* the date the proposal is submitted, thereby leaving a gap between the date of the verification and the date the proposal is submitted. In other cases, the letter speaks as of a date *after* the date the proposal was submitted but covers a period of only one year, thus failing to verify the shareholder's beneficial ownership over the required full one-year period preceding the date of the proposal's submission.

Second, many letters fail to confirm continuous ownership of the securities. This can occur when a broker or bank submits a letter that confirms the shareholder's beneficial ownership only as of a specified date but omits any reference to continuous ownership for a one-year period.

We recognize that the requirements of Rule 14a-8(b) are highly prescriptive and can cause inconvenience for shareholders when submitting proposals. Although our administration of Rule 14a-8(b) is constrained by the terms of the rule, we believe that shareholders can avoid the two errors highlighted above by arranging to have their broker or bank provide the required verification of ownership as of the date they plan to submit the proposal using the following format:

"As of [date the proposal is submitted], [name of shareholder] held, and has held continuously for at least one year, [number of securities] shares of [company name] [class of securities]."<sup>11</sup>

As discussed above, a shareholder may also need to provide a separate written statement from the DTC participant through which the shareholder's securities are held if the shareholder's broker or bank is not a DTC participant.

### **D. The submission of revised proposals**

On occasion, a shareholder will revise a proposal after submitting it to a company. This section addresses questions we have received regarding revisions to a proposal or supporting statement.

**1. A shareholder submits a timely proposal. The shareholder then submits a revised proposal before the company's deadline for receiving proposals. Must the company accept the revisions?**

Yes. In this situation, we believe the revised proposal serves as a replacement of the initial proposal. By submitting a revised proposal, the shareholder has effectively withdrawn the initial proposal. Therefore, the shareholder is not in violation of the one-proposal limitation in Rule 14a-8(c).<sup>12</sup> If the company intends to submit a no-action request, it must do so with respect to the revised proposal.

We recognize that in Question and Answer E.2 of SLB No. 14, we indicated that if a shareholder makes revisions to a proposal before the company submits its no-action request, the company can choose whether to accept the revisions. However, this guidance has led some companies to believe that, in cases where shareholders attempt to make changes to an initial proposal, the company is free to ignore such revisions even if the revised proposal is submitted before the company's deadline for receiving shareholder proposals. We are revising our guidance on this issue to make clear that a company may not ignore a revised proposal in this situation.<sup>13</sup>

**2. A shareholder submits a timely proposal. After the deadline for receiving proposals, the shareholder submits a revised proposal. Must the company accept the revisions?**

No. If a shareholder submits revisions to a proposal after the deadline for receiving proposals under Rule 14a-8(e), the company is not required to accept the revisions. However, if the company does not accept the revisions, it must treat the revised proposal as a second proposal and submit a notice stating its intention to exclude the revised proposal, as required by Rule 14a-8(j). The company's notice may cite Rule 14a-8(e) as the reason for excluding the revised proposal. If the company does not accept the revisions and intends to exclude the initial proposal, it would also need to submit its reasons for excluding the initial proposal.

**3. If a shareholder submits a revised proposal, as of which date must the shareholder prove his or her share ownership?**

A shareholder must prove ownership as of the date the original proposal is submitted. When the Commission has discussed revisions to proposals,<sup>14</sup> it has not suggested that a revision triggers a requirement to provide proof of ownership a second time. As outlined in Rule 14a-8(b), proving ownership includes providing a written statement that the shareholder intends to continue to hold the securities through the date of the shareholder meeting. Rule 14a-8(f)(2) provides that if the shareholder "fails in [his or her] promise to hold the required number of securities through the date of the meeting of shareholders, then the company will be permitted to exclude all of [the same shareholder's] proposals from its proxy materials for any meeting held in the following two calendar years." With these provisions in mind, we do not interpret Rule 14a-8 as requiring additional proof of ownership when a shareholder submits a revised proposal.<sup>15</sup>

**E. Procedures for withdrawing no-action requests for proposals submitted by multiple proponents**

We have previously addressed the requirements for withdrawing a Rule 14a-8 no-action request in SLB Nos. 14 and 14C. SLB No. 14 notes that a company should include with a withdrawal letter documentation demonstrating that a shareholder has withdrawn the proposal. In cases where a proposal submitted by multiple shareholders is withdrawn, SLB No. 14C states that, if each shareholder has designated a lead individual to act

on its behalf and the company is able to demonstrate that the individual is authorized to act on behalf of all of the proponents, the company need only provide a letter from that lead individual indicating that the lead individual is withdrawing the proposal on behalf of all of the proponents.

Because there is no relief granted by the staff in cases where a no-action request is withdrawn following the withdrawal of the related proposal, we recognize that the threshold for withdrawing a no-action request need not be overly burdensome. Going forward, we will process a withdrawal request if the company provides a letter from the lead filer that includes a representation that the lead filer is authorized to withdraw the proposal on behalf of each proponent identified in the company's no-action request.<sup>16</sup>

#### **F. Use of email to transmit our Rule 14a-8 no-action responses to companies and proponents**

To date, the Division has transmitted copies of our Rule 14a-8 no-action responses, including copies of the correspondence we have received in connection with such requests, by U.S. mail to companies and proponents. We also post our response and the related correspondence to the Commission's website shortly after issuance of our response.

In order to accelerate delivery of staff responses to companies and proponents, and to reduce our copying and postage costs, going forward, we intend to transmit our Rule 14a-8 no-action responses by email to companies and proponents. We therefore encourage both companies and proponents to include email contact information in any correspondence to each other and to us. We will use U.S. mail to transmit our no-action response to any company or proponent for which we do not have email contact information.

Given the availability of our responses and the related correspondence on the Commission's website and the requirement under Rule 14a-8 for companies and proponents to copy each other on correspondence submitted to the Commission, we believe it is unnecessary to transmit copies of the related correspondence along with our no-action response. Therefore, we intend to transmit only our staff response and not the correspondence we receive from the parties. We will continue to post to the Commission's website copies of this correspondence at the same time that we post our staff no-action response.

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<sup>1</sup> See Rule 14a-8(b).

<sup>2</sup> For an explanation of the types of share ownership in the U.S., see Concept Release on U.S. Proxy System, Release No. 34-62495 (July 14, 2010) [75 FR 42982] ("Proxy Mechanics Concept Release"), at Section II.A. The term "beneficial owner" does not have a uniform meaning under the federal securities laws. It has a different meaning in this bulletin as compared to "beneficial owner" and "beneficial ownership" in Sections 13 and 16 of the Exchange Act. Our use of the term in this bulletin is not intended to suggest that registered owners are not beneficial owners for purposes of those Exchange Act provisions. See Proposed Amendments to Rule 14a-8 under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 Relating to Proposals by Security Holders, Release No. 34-12598 (July 7, 1976) [41 FR 29982], at n.2 ("The term 'beneficial owner' when used in the context of the proxy rules, and in light of the purposes of those rules, may be interpreted to have a broader meaning than it would for certain other purpose[s] under the federal securities laws, such as reporting pursuant to the Williams Act.").

<sup>3</sup> If a shareholder has filed a Schedule 13D, Schedule 13G, Form 3, Form 4 or Form 5 reflecting ownership of the required amount of shares, the shareholder may instead prove ownership by submitting a copy of such filings and providing the additional information that is described in Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(ii).

<sup>4</sup> DTC holds the deposited securities in "fungible bulk," meaning that there are no specifically identifiable shares directly owned by the DTC participants. Rather, each DTC participant holds a pro rata interest or position in the aggregate number of shares of a particular issuer held at DTC. Correspondingly, each customer of a DTC participant – such as an individual investor – owns a pro rata interest in the shares in which the DTC participant has a pro rata interest. See Proxy Mechanics Concept Release, at Section II.B.2.a.

<sup>5</sup> See Exchange Act Rule 17Ad-8.

<sup>6</sup> See Net Capital Rule, Release No. 34-31511 (Nov. 24, 1992) [57 FR 56973] ("Net Capital Rule Release"), at Section II.C.

<sup>7</sup> See *KBR Inc. v. Chevedden*, Civil Action No. H-11-0196, 2011 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 36431, 2011 WL 1463611 (S.D. Tex. Apr. 4, 2011); *Apache Corp. v. Chevedden*, 696 F. Supp. 2d 723 (S.D. Tex. 2010). In both cases, the court concluded that a securities intermediary was not a record holder for purposes of Rule 14a-8(b) because it did not appear on a list of the company's non-objecting beneficial owners or on any DTC securities position listing, nor was the intermediary a DTC participant.

<sup>8</sup> *Techne Corp.* (Sept. 20, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> In addition, if the shareholder's broker is an introducing broker, the shareholder's account statements should include the clearing broker's identity and telephone number. See Net Capital Rule Release, at Section II.C.(iii). The clearing broker will generally be a DTC participant.

<sup>10</sup> For purposes of Rule 14a-8(b), the submission date of a proposal will generally precede the company's receipt date of the proposal, absent the use of electronic or other means of same-day delivery.

<sup>11</sup> This format is acceptable for purposes of Rule 14a-8(b), but it is not mandatory or exclusive.

<sup>12</sup> As such, it is not appropriate for a company to send a notice of defect for multiple proposals under Rule 14a-8(c) upon receiving a revised proposal.

<sup>13</sup> This position will apply to all proposals submitted after an initial proposal but before the company's deadline for receiving proposals, regardless of whether they are explicitly labeled as "revisions" to an initial proposal, unless the shareholder affirmatively indicates an intent to submit a second, *additional* proposal for inclusion in the company's proxy materials. In that case, the company must send the shareholder a notice of defect pursuant to Rule 14a-8(f)(1) if it intends to exclude either proposal from its proxy materials in reliance on Rule 14a-8(c). In light of this guidance, with respect to proposals or revisions received before a company's deadline for submission, we will no longer follow *Layne Christensen Co.* (Mar. 21, 2011) and other prior staff no-action letters in which we took the view that a proposal would violate the Rule 14a-8(c) one-proposal limitation if such proposal is submitted to a company after the company has either submitted a Rule 14a-8 no-action request to exclude an earlier proposal submitted by

the same proponent or notified the proponent that the earlier proposal was excludable under the rule.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Adoption of Amendments Relating to Proposals by Security Holders, Release No. 34-12999 (Nov. 22, 1976) [41 FR 52994].

<sup>15</sup> Because the relevant date for proving ownership under Rule 14a-8(b) is the date the proposal is submitted, a proponent who does not adequately prove ownership in connection with a proposal is not permitted to submit another proposal for the same meeting on a later date.

<sup>16</sup> Nothing in this staff position has any effect on the status of any shareholder proposal that is not withdrawn by the proponent or its authorized representative.

<http://www.sec.gov/interps/legal/cfslb14f.htm>

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Modified: 10/18/2011



## U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission

### Division of Corporation Finance Securities and Exchange Commission

## Shareholder Proposals

### Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14I (CF)

**Action:** Publication of CF Staff Legal Bulletin

**Date:** November 1, 2017

**Summary:** This staff legal bulletin provides information for companies and shareholders regarding Rule 14a-8 under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934.

**Supplementary Information:** The statements in this bulletin represent the views of the Division of Corporation Finance (the "Division"). This bulletin is not a rule, regulation or statement of the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "Commission"). Further, the Commission has neither approved nor disapproved its content.

**Contacts:** For further information, please contact the Division's Office of Chief Counsel by submitting a web-based request form at [https://www.sec.gov/forms/corp\\_fin\\_interpretive](https://www.sec.gov/forms/corp_fin_interpretive).

#### A. The purpose of this bulletin

This bulletin is part of a continuing effort by the Division to provide guidance on important issues arising under Exchange Act Rule 14a-8. Specifically, this bulletin contains information about the Division's views on:

- the scope and application of Rule 14a-8(i)(7);
- the scope and application of Rule 14a-8(i)(5);
- proposals submitted on behalf of shareholders; and
- the use of graphs and images consistent with Rule 14a-8(d).

You can find additional guidance about Rule 14a-8 in the following bulletins that are available on the Commission's website: [SLB No. 14](#), [SLB No. 14A](#), [SLB No. 14B](#), [SLB No. 14C](#), [SLB No. 14D](#), [SLB No. 14E](#), [SLB No. 14F](#), [SLB No. 14G](#) and [SLB No. 14H](#).

#### B. Rule 14a-8(i)(7)

##### 1. Background

Rule 14a-8(i)(7), the "ordinary business" exception, is one of the substantive bases for exclusion of a shareholder proposal in Rule 14a-8. It permits a company to exclude a proposal that "deals with a matter relating to the company's ordinary business operations." The purpose of the exception is "to confine the resolution of ordinary business problems to management and the board of directors, since it is impracticable for shareholders to decide how to solve such problems at an annual shareholders meeting."<sup>[1]</sup>

## **2. The Division's application of Rule 14a-8(i)(7)**

The Commission has stated that the policy underlying the "ordinary business" exception rests on two central considerations.<sup>[2]</sup> The first relates to the proposal's subject matter; the second, the degree to which the proposal "micromanages" the company. Under the first consideration, proposals that raise matters that are "so fundamental to management's ability to run a company on a day-to-day basis that they could not, as a practical matter, be subject to direct shareholder oversight" may be excluded, unless such a proposal focuses on policy issues that are sufficiently significant because they transcend ordinary business and would be appropriate for a shareholder vote.<sup>[3]</sup> Whether the significant policy exception applies depends, in part, on the connection between the significant policy issue and the company's business operations.<sup>[4]</sup>

At issue in many Rule 14a-8(i)(7) no-action requests is whether a proposal that addresses ordinary business matters nonetheless focuses on a policy issue that is sufficiently significant. These determinations often raise difficult judgment calls that the Division believes are in the first instance matters that the board of directors is generally in a better position to determine. A board of directors, acting as steward with fiduciary duties to a company's shareholders, generally has significant duties of loyalty and care in overseeing management and the strategic direction of the company. A board acting in this capacity and with the knowledge of the company's business and the implications for a particular proposal on that company's business is well situated to analyze, determine and explain whether a particular issue is sufficiently significant because the matter transcends ordinary business and would be appropriate for a shareholder vote.

Accordingly, going forward, we would expect a company's no-action request to include a discussion that reflects the board's analysis of the particular policy issue raised and its significance. That explanation would be most helpful if it detailed the specific processes employed by the board to ensure that its conclusions are well-informed and well-reasoned. We believe that a well-developed discussion of the board's analysis of these matters will greatly assist the staff with its review of no-action requests under Rule 14a-8(i)(7).

### **C. Rule 14a-8(i)(5)**

#### **1. Background**

Rule 14a-8(i)(5), the "economic relevance" exception, is one of the substantive bases for exclusion of a shareholder proposal in Rule 14a-8. It permits a company to exclude a proposal that "relates to operations which account for less than 5 percent of the company's total assets at the end of its most recent fiscal year, and for less than 5 percent of its net earnings and gross sales for its most recent fiscal year, and is not otherwise significantly related to the company's business."

#### **2. History of Rule 14a-8(i)(5)**

Prior to adoption of the current version of the exclusion in Rule 14a-8(i)(5), the rule permitted companies to omit any proposal that "deals with a matter that is not significantly related to the issuer's business." In proposing changes to that version of the rule in 1982, the Commission noted that the staff's practice had been to agree with exclusion of proposals that bore no economic relationship to a company's business, but that "where the proposal has reflected social or ethical issues, rather than economic concerns, raised by the issuer's business, and the issuer conducts any such business, no matter how small, the staff has not issued a no-action letter with respect to the omission of the proposal."<sup>[5]</sup> The

Commission stated that this interpretation of the rule may have “unduly limit[ed] the exclusion,” and proposed adopting the economic tests that appear in the rule today.<sup>[6]</sup> In adopting the rule, the Commission characterized it as relating “to proposals concerning the functioning of the economic business of an issuer and not to such matters as shareholders’ rights, e.g., cumulative voting.”<sup>[7]</sup>

Shortly after the 1983 amendments, however, the District Court for the District of Columbia in *Lovenheim v. Iroquois Brands, Ltd.*, 618 F. Supp. 554 (D.D.C. 1985) preliminarily enjoined a company from excluding a proposal regarding sales of a product line that represented only 0.05% of assets, \$79,000 in sales and a net loss of (\$3,121), compared to the company’s total assets of \$78 million, annual revenues of \$141 million and net earnings of \$6 million. The court based its decision to grant the injunction “in light of the ethical and social significance” of the proposal and on “the fact that it implicates significant levels of sales.” Since that time, the Division has interpreted *Lovenheim* in a manner that has significantly narrowed the scope of Rule 14a-8(i)(5).

### **3. The Division’s application of Rule 14a-8(i)(5)**

Over the years, the Division has only infrequently agreed with exclusion under the “economic relevance” exception. Under its historical application, the Division has not agreed with exclusion under Rule 14a-8(i)(5), even where a proposal has related to operations that accounted for less than 5% of total assets, net earnings and gross sales, where the company conducted business, no matter how small, related to the issue raised in the proposal. The Division’s analysis has not focused on a proposal’s significance to the company’s business. As a result, the Division’s analysis has been similar to its analysis prior to 1983, with which the Commission expressed concern.

That analysis simply considered whether a company conducted any amount of business related to the issue in the proposal and whether that issue was of broad social or ethical concern. We believe the Division’s application of Rule 14a-8(i)(5) has unduly limited the exclusion’s availability because it has not fully considered the second prong of the rule as amended in 1982 – the question of whether the proposal “deals with a matter that is not significantly related to the issuer’s business” and is therefore excludable. Accordingly, going forward, the Division’s analysis will focus, as the rule directs, on a proposal’s significance to the company’s business when it otherwise relates to operations that account for less than 5% of total assets, net earnings and gross sales. Under this framework, proposals that raise issues of social or ethical significance may be included or excluded, notwithstanding their importance in the abstract, based on the application and analysis of each of the factors of Rule 14a-8(i)(5) in determining the proposal’s relevance to the company’s business.

Because the test only allows exclusion when the matter is not “otherwise significantly related to the company,” we view the analysis as dependent upon the particular circumstances of the company to which the proposal is submitted. That is, a matter significant to one company may not be significant to another. On the other hand, we would generally view substantive governance matters to be significantly related to almost all companies.

Where a proposal’s significance to a company’s business is not apparent on its face, a proposal may be excludable unless the proponent demonstrates that it is “otherwise significantly related to the company’s business.”<sup>[8]</sup> For example, the proponent can provide information demonstrating that the proposal “may have a significant impact on other segments of the issuer’s business or subject the issuer to significant contingent liabilities.”<sup>[9]</sup> The proponent could continue to raise social or ethical issues in its arguments,

but it would need to tie those to a significant effect on the company's business. The mere possibility of reputational or economic harm will not preclude no-action relief. In evaluating significance, the staff will consider the proposal in light of the "total mix" of information about the issuer.

As with the "ordinary business" exception in Rule 14a-8(i)(7), determining whether a proposal is "otherwise significantly related to the company's business" can raise difficult judgment calls. Similarly, we believe that the board of directors is generally in a better position to determine these matters in the first instance. A board acting with the knowledge of the company's business and the implications for a particular proposal on that company's business is better situated than the staff to determine whether a particular proposal is "otherwise significantly related to the company's business." Accordingly, we would expect a company's Rule 14a-8(i)(5) no-action request to include a discussion that reflects the board's analysis of the proposal's significance to the company. That explanation would be most helpful if it detailed the specific processes employed by the board to ensure that its conclusions are well-informed and well-reasoned.

In addition, the Division's analysis of whether a proposal is "otherwise significantly related" under Rule 14a-8(i)(5) has historically been informed by its analysis under the "ordinary business" exception, Rule 14a-8(i)(7). As a result, the availability or unavailability of Rule 14a-8(i)(7) has been largely determinative of the availability or unavailability of Rule 14a-8(i)(5). Going forward, the Division will no longer look to its analysis under Rule 14a-8(i)(7) when evaluating arguments under Rule 14a-8(i)(5). In our view, applying separate analytical frameworks will ensure that each basis for exclusion serves its intended purpose.

We believe the approach going forward is more appropriately rooted in the intended purpose and language of Rule 14a-8(i)(5), and better helps companies, proponents and the staff determine whether a proposal is "otherwise significantly related to the company's business."

#### **D. Proposals submitted on behalf of shareholders**

While Rule 14a-8 does not address shareholders' ability to submit proposals through a representative, shareholders frequently elect to do so, a practice commonly referred to as "proposal by proxy." The Division has been, and continues to be, of the view that a shareholder's submission by proxy is consistent with Rule 14a-8.<sup>[10]</sup>

The Division is nevertheless mindful of challenges and concerns that proposals by proxy may present. For example, there may be questions about whether the eligibility requirements of Rule 14a-8(b) have been satisfied. There have also been concerns raised that shareholders may not know that proposals are being submitted on their behalf. In light of these challenges and concerns, and to help the staff and companies better evaluate whether the eligibility requirements of Rule 14a-8(b) have been satisfied, going forward, the staff will look to whether the shareholders who submit a proposal by proxy provide documentation describing the shareholder's delegation of authority to the proxy.<sup>[11]</sup> In general, we would expect this documentation to:

- identify the shareholder-proponent and the person or entity selected as proxy;
- identify the company to which the proposal is directed;
- identify the annual or special meeting for which the proposal is submitted;

- identify the specific proposal to be submitted (e.g., proposal to lower the threshold for calling a special meeting from 25% to 10%); and
- be signed and dated by the shareholder.

We believe this documentation will help alleviate concerns about proposals by proxy, and will also help companies and the staff better evaluate whether the eligibility requirements of Rule 14a-8(b) have been satisfied in connection with a proposal's submission by proxy. Where this information is not provided, there may be a basis to exclude the proposal under Rule 14a-8(b).<sup>[12]</sup>

## **E. Rule 14a-8(d)**

### **1. Background**

Rule 14a-8(d) is one of the procedural bases for exclusion of a shareholder proposal in Rule 14a-8. It provides that a "proposal, including any accompanying supporting statement, may not exceed 500 words."

### **2. The use of images in shareholder proposals**

Questions have recently arisen concerning the application of Rule 14a-8(d) to proposals that include graphs and/or images.<sup>[13]</sup> In two recent no-action decisions,<sup>[14]</sup> the Division expressed the view that the use of "500 words" and absence of express reference to graphics or images in Rule 14a-8(d) do not prohibit the inclusion of graphs and/or images in proposals.<sup>[15]</sup> Just as companies include graphics that are not expressly permitted under the disclosure rules, the Division is of the view that Rule 14a-8(d) does not preclude shareholders from using graphics to convey information about their proposals.<sup>[16]</sup>

The Division recognizes the potential for abuse in this area. The Division believes, however, that these potential abuses can be addressed through other provisions of Rule 14a-8. For example, exclusion of graphs and/or images would be appropriate under Rule 14a-8(i)(3) where they:

- make the proposal materially false or misleading;
- render the proposal so inherently vague or indefinite that neither the stockholders voting on the proposal, nor the company in implementing it, would be able to determine with any reasonable certainty exactly what actions or measures the proposal requires;
- directly or indirectly impugn character, integrity or personal reputation, or directly or indirectly make charges concerning improper, illegal, or immoral conduct or association, without factual foundation; or
- are irrelevant to a consideration of the subject matter of the proposal, such that there is a strong likelihood that a reasonable shareholder would be uncertain as to the matter on which he or she is being asked to vote.<sup>[17]</sup>

Exclusion would also be appropriate under Rule 14a-8(d) if the total number of words in a proposal, including words in the graphics, exceeds 500.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Release No. 34-40018 (May 21, 1998).

<sup>[2]</sup> *Id.*

<sup>[3]</sup> *Id.*

[4] See Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14H (Oct. 22, 2015), *citing* Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14E (Oct. 27, 2009) (stating that a proposal generally will not be excludable “as long as a sufficient nexus exists between the nature of the proposal and the company”).

[5] Release No. 34-19135 (Oct. 14, 1982).

[6] *Id.*

[7] Release No. 34-20091 (Aug. 16, 1983).

[8] Proponents bear the burden of demonstrating that a proposal is “otherwise significantly related to the company’s business.” See Release No. 34-39093 (Sep. 18, 1997), *citing* Release No. 34-19135.

[9] Release No. 34-19135.

[10] We view a shareholder’s ability to submit a proposal by proxy as largely a function of state agency law provided it is consistent with Rule 14a-8.

[11] This guidance applies only to proposals submitted by proxy after the date on which this staff legal bulletin is published.

[12] Companies that intend to seek exclusion under Rule 14a-8(b) based on a shareholder’s failure to provide some or all of this information must notify the proponent of the specific defect(s) within 14 calendar days of receiving the proposal so that the proponent has an opportunity to cure the defect. See Rule 14a-8(f)(1).

[13] Rule 14a-8(d) is intended to limit the amount of space a shareholder proposal may occupy in a company’s proxy statement. See Release No. 34-12999 (Nov. 22, 1976).

[14] *General Electric Co.* (Feb. 3, 2017, *recon. granted* Feb. 23, 2017); *General Electric Co.* (Feb. 23, 2016).

[15] These decisions were consistent with a longstanding Division position. See *Ferrofluidics Corp.* (Sep. 18, 1992).

[16] Companies should not minimize or otherwise diminish the appearance of a shareholder’s graphic. For example, if the company includes its own graphics in its proxy statement, it should give similar prominence to a shareholder’s graphics. If a company’s proxy statement appears in black and white, however, the shareholder proposal and accompanying graphics may also appear in black and white.

[17] See *General Electric Co.* (Feb. 23, 2017),

<http://www.sec.gov/interps/legal/cfs1b14i.htm>



## U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission

### Division of Corporation Finance Securities and Exchange Commission

## Shareholder Proposals

### Staff Legal Bulletin No. 14G (CF)

**Action:** Publication of CF Staff Legal Bulletin

**Date:** October 16, 2012

**Summary:** This staff legal bulletin provides information for companies and shareholders regarding Rule 14a-8 under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934.

**Supplementary Information:** The statements in this bulletin represent the views of the Division of Corporation Finance (the "Division"). This bulletin is not a rule, regulation or statement of the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "Commission"). Further, the Commission has neither approved nor disapproved its content.

**Contacts:** For further information, please contact the Division's Office of Chief Counsel by calling (202) 551-3500 or by submitting a web-based request form at [https://www.sec.gov/forms/corp\\_fin\\_interpretive](https://www.sec.gov/forms/corp_fin_interpretive).

#### A. The purpose of this bulletin

This bulletin is part of a continuing effort by the Division to provide guidance on important issues arising under Exchange Act Rule 14a-8. Specifically, this bulletin contains information regarding:

- the parties that can provide proof of ownership under Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i) for purposes of verifying whether a beneficial owner is eligible to submit a proposal under Rule 14a-8;
- the manner in which companies should notify proponents of a failure to provide proof of ownership for the one-year period required under Rule 14a-8(b)(1); and
- the use of website references in proposals and supporting statements.

You can find additional guidance regarding Rule 14a-8 in the following bulletins that are available on the Commission's website: [SLB No. 14](#), [SLB No. 14A](#), [SLB No. 14B](#), [SLB No. 14C](#), [SLB No. 14D](#), [SLB No. 14E](#) and [SLB No. 14F](#).

#### B. Parties that can provide proof of ownership under Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i) for purposes of verifying whether a beneficial owner is eligible to submit a proposal under Rule 14a-8

1. Sufficiency of proof of ownership letters provided by affiliates of DTC participants for purposes of Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i)

To be eligible to submit a proposal under Rule 14a-8, a shareholder must, among other things, provide documentation evidencing that the shareholder has continuously held at least \$2,000 in market value, or 1%, of the company's securities entitled to be voted on the proposal at the shareholder meeting for at least one year as of the date the shareholder submits the proposal. If the shareholder is a beneficial owner of the securities, which means that the securities are held in book-entry form through a securities intermediary, Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i) provides that this documentation can be in the form of a "written statement from the 'record' holder of your securities (usually a broker or bank)...."

In SLB No. 14F, the Division described its view that only securities intermediaries that are participants in the Depository Trust Company ("DTC") should be viewed as "record" holders of securities that are deposited at DTC for purposes of Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i). Therefore, a beneficial owner must obtain a proof of ownership letter from the DTC participant through which its securities are held at DTC in order to satisfy the proof of ownership requirements in Rule 14a-8.

During the most recent proxy season, some companies questioned the sufficiency of proof of ownership letters from entities that were not themselves DTC participants, but were affiliates of DTC participants.<sup>1</sup> By virtue of the affiliate relationship, we believe that a securities intermediary holding shares through its affiliated DTC participant should be in a position to verify its customers' ownership of securities. Accordingly, we are of the view that, for purposes of Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i), a proof of ownership letter from an affiliate of a DTC participant satisfies the requirement to provide a proof of ownership letter from a DTC participant.

## **2. Adequacy of proof of ownership letters from securities intermediaries that are not brokers or banks**

We understand that there are circumstances in which securities intermediaries that are not brokers or banks maintain securities accounts in the ordinary course of their business. A shareholder who holds securities through a securities intermediary that is not a broker or bank can satisfy Rule 14a-8's documentation requirement by submitting a proof of ownership letter from that securities intermediary.<sup>2</sup> If the securities intermediary is not a DTC participant or an affiliate of a DTC participant, then the shareholder will also need to obtain a proof of ownership letter from the DTC participant or an affiliate of a DTC participant that can verify the holdings of the securities intermediary.

## **C. Manner in which companies should notify proponents of a failure to provide proof of ownership for the one-year period required under Rule 14a-8(b)(1)**

As discussed in Section C of SLB No. 14F, a common error in proof of ownership letters is that they do not verify a proponent's beneficial ownership for the entire one-year period preceding and including the date the proposal was submitted, as required by Rule 14a-8(b)(1). In some cases, the letter speaks as of a date *before* the date the proposal was submitted, thereby leaving a gap between the date of verification and the date the proposal was submitted. In other cases, the letter speaks as of a date *after* the date the proposal was submitted but covers a period of only one year, thus failing to verify the proponent's beneficial ownership over the required full one-year period preceding the date of the proposal's submission.

Under Rule 14a-8(f), if a proponent fails to follow one of the eligibility or procedural requirements of the rule, a company may exclude the proposal only if it notifies the proponent of the defect and the proponent fails to

correct it. In SLB No. 14 and SLB No. 14B, we explained that companies should provide adequate detail about what a proponent must do to remedy all eligibility or procedural defects.

We are concerned that companies' notices of defect are not adequately describing the defects or explaining what a proponent must do to remedy defects in proof of ownership letters. For example, some companies' notices of defect make no mention of the gap in the period of ownership covered by the proponent's proof of ownership letter or other specific deficiencies that the company has identified. We do not believe that such notices of defect serve the purpose of Rule 14a-8(f).

Accordingly, going forward, we will not concur in the exclusion of a proposal under Rules 14a-8(b) and 14a-8(f) on the basis that a proponent's proof of ownership does not cover the one-year period preceding and including the date the proposal is submitted unless the company provides a notice of defect that identifies the specific date on which the proposal was submitted and explains that the proponent must obtain a new proof of ownership letter verifying continuous ownership of the requisite amount of securities for the one-year period preceding and including such date to cure the defect. We view the proposal's date of submission as the date the proposal is postmarked or transmitted electronically. Identifying in the notice of defect the specific date on which the proposal was submitted will help a proponent better understand how to remedy the defects described above and will be particularly helpful in those instances in which it may be difficult for a proponent to determine the date of submission, such as when the proposal is not postmarked on the same day it is placed in the mail. In addition, companies should include copies of the postmark or evidence of electronic transmission with their no-action requests.

#### **D. Use of website addresses in proposals and supporting statements**

Recently, a number of proponents have included in their proposals or in their supporting statements the addresses to websites that provide more information about their proposals. In some cases, companies have sought to exclude either the website address or the entire proposal due to the reference to the website address.

In SLB No. 14, we explained that a reference to a website address in a proposal does not raise the concerns addressed by the 500-word limitation in Rule 14a-8(d). We continue to be of this view and, accordingly, we will continue to count a website address as one word for purposes of Rule 14a-8(d). To the extent that the company seeks the exclusion of a website reference in a proposal, but not the proposal itself, we will continue to follow the guidance stated in SLB No. 14, which provides that references to website addresses in proposals or supporting statements could be subject to exclusion under Rule 14a-8(i)(3) if the information contained on the website is materially false or misleading, irrelevant to the subject matter of the proposal or otherwise in contravention of the proxy rules, including Rule 14a-9.<sup>3</sup>

In light of the growing interest in including references to website addresses in proposals and supporting statements, we are providing additional guidance on the appropriate use of website addresses in proposals and supporting statements.<sup>4</sup>

##### **1. References to website addresses in a proposal or supporting statement and Rule 14a-8(i)(3)**

References to websites in a proposal or supporting statement may raise concerns under Rule 14a-8(i)(3). In SLB No. 14B, we stated that the

exclusion of a proposal under Rule 14a-8(i)(3) as vague and indefinite may be appropriate if neither the shareholders voting on the proposal, nor the company in implementing the proposal (if adopted), would be able to determine with any reasonable certainty exactly what actions or measures the proposal requires. In evaluating whether a proposal may be excluded on this basis, we consider only the information contained in the proposal and supporting statement and determine whether, based on that information, shareholders and the company can determine what actions the proposal seeks.

If a proposal or supporting statement refers to a website that provides information necessary for shareholders and the company to understand with reasonable certainty exactly what actions or measures the proposal requires, and such information is not also contained in the proposal or in the supporting statement, then we believe the proposal would raise concerns under Rule 14a-9 and would be subject to exclusion under Rule 14a-8(i)(3) as vague and indefinite. By contrast, if shareholders and the company can understand with reasonable certainty exactly what actions or measures the proposal requires without reviewing the information provided on the website, then we believe that the proposal would not be subject to exclusion under Rule 14a-8(i)(3) on the basis of the reference to the website address. In this case, the information on the website only supplements the information contained in the proposal and in the supporting statement.

## **2. Providing the company with the materials that will be published on the referenced website**

We recognize that if a proposal references a website that is not operational at the time the proposal is submitted, it will be impossible for a company or the staff to evaluate whether the website reference may be excluded. In our view, a reference to a non-operational website in a proposal or supporting statement could be excluded under Rule 14a-8(i)(3) as irrelevant to the subject matter of a proposal. We understand, however, that a proponent may wish to include a reference to a website containing information related to the proposal but wait to activate the website until it becomes clear that the proposal will be included in the company's proxy materials. Therefore, we will not concur that a reference to a website may be excluded as irrelevant under Rule 14a-8(i)(3) on the basis that it is not yet operational if the proponent, at the time the proposal is submitted, provides the company with the materials that are intended for publication on the website and a representation that the website will become operational at, or prior to, the time the company files its definitive proxy materials.

## **3. Potential issues that may arise if the content of a referenced website changes after the proposal is submitted**

To the extent the information on a website changes after submission of a proposal and the company believes the revised information renders the website reference excludable under Rule 14a-8, a company seeking our concurrence that the website reference may be excluded must submit a letter presenting its reasons for doing so. While Rule 14a-8(j) requires a company to submit its reasons for exclusion with the Commission no later than 80 calendar days before it files its definitive proxy materials, we may concur that the changes to the referenced website constitute "good cause" for the company to file its reasons for excluding the website reference after the 80-day deadline and grant the company's request that the 80-day requirement be waived.

<sup>1</sup> An entity is an "affiliate" of a DTC participant if such entity directly, or indirectly through one or more intermediaries, controls or is controlled by, or is under common control with, the DTC participant.

<sup>2</sup> Rule 14a-8(b)(2)(i) itself acknowledges that the record holder is "usually," but not always, a broker or bank.

<sup>3</sup> Rule 14a-9 prohibits statements in proxy materials which, at the time and in the light of the circumstances under which they are made, are false or misleading with respect to any material fact, or which omit to state any material fact necessary in order to make the statements not false or misleading.

<sup>4</sup> A website that provides more information about a shareholder proposal may constitute a proxy solicitation under the proxy rules. Accordingly, we remind shareholders who elect to include website addresses in their proposals to comply with all applicable rules regarding proxy solicitations.

<http://www.sec.gov/interps/legal/cfs1b14g.htm>

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Modified: 10/16/2012

# **EXHIBIT C**

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**From:** John Chevedden <\*\*\*>  
**Sent:** Friday, December 18, 2020 12:47 PM  
**To:** Moffatt, Thomas S.  
**Cc:** McIntosh, Colleen  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Rule 14a-8 Proposal (CVS) blb  
**Attachments:** 18122020\_2.pdf

\*\*\*\* External Email - Use Caution \*\*\*\*

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Mr. Moffatt,  
Please see the attached broker letter.  
Please confirm receipt.  
Sincerely,  
John Chevedden



12/18/2020

Kenneth Steiner

\*\*\*

Re: Account ending \*\*\* in TD Ameritrade Clearing Inc DTC# 0188

Dear Kenneth Steiner,

As you requested this letter confirms that as of the date of this letter you have continuously held no less than 500 shares of each of the following stocks in the above reference account since August 17, 2019:

Zynga Inc (ZNGA)  
Molson Coors Beverage Co Cl B (TAP)  
CVS Health Corp (CVS)

If we can be of any further assistance, please let us know. Just log in to your account and go to the Message Center to write us. You can also call Client Services at 800-669-3900. We're available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Sincerely,

Andrew P. Haag  
Resource Specialist  
TD Ameritrade

This information is furnished as part of a general information service and TD Ameritrade shall not be liable for any damages arising out of any inaccuracy in the information. Because this information may differ from your TD Ameritrade monthly statement, you should rely only on the TD Ameritrade monthly statement as the official record of your TD Ameritrade account.

Market volatility, volume, and system availability may delay account access and trade executions.

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# **EXHIBIT D**

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**From:** John Chevedden \*\*\* >  
**Sent:** Monday, December 28, 2020 12:44 PM  
**To:** Moffatt, Thomas S.  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Rule 14a-8 Proposal (CVS) blb  
**Attachments:** 28122020\_4.pdf

\*\*\*\* External Email - Use Caution \*\*\*\*

---

Mr. Moffatt,  
Please see the attached letters.  
John Chevedden

Kenneth Steiner

\*\*\*



Ms. Colleen M. McIntosh  
CVS Caremark Corporation (CVS)  
One CVS Drive  
Woonsocket RI 02895  
PH: 401-765-1500

RECEIVED 04 DEC 2020

Dear Ms. McIntosh,

I purchased stock in our company because I believed our company had potential for improved performance. My attached Rule 14a-8 proposal is submitted in support of the long-term performance of our company. This Rule 14a-8 proposal is submitted as a low-cost method to improve company performance.

My proposal is for the next annual shareholder meeting. I will meet Rule 14a-8 requirements including the continuous ownership of the required stock value until after the date of the respective shareholder meeting. My submitted format, with the shareholder-supplied emphasis, is intended to be used for definitive proxy publication. This is my proxy for John Chevedden and/or his designee to forward this Rule 14a-8 proposal to the company and to act on my behalf regarding this Rule 14a-8 proposal, and/or modification of it, for the forthcoming shareholder meeting before, during and after the forthcoming shareholder meeting. Please direct all future communications regarding my rule 14a-8 proposal to John Chevedden

\*\*\*



at:

to facilitate prompt and verifiable communications. Please identify this proposal as my proposal exclusively.

This letter does not cover proposals that are not rule 14a-8 proposals. This letter does not grant the power to vote. Your consideration and the consideration of the Board of Directors is appreciated in support of the long-term performance of our company. Please acknowledge receipt of my proposal promptly by email to \*\*\*

Sincerely,

Kenneth Steiner

10-14-20

Date

cc: Thomas Moffatt <TSMoffatt@cv.com>  
FX: 401-216-3758  
FX: 401-765-7887

Proposal 4 - Independent Board Chairman

  
12-11-20

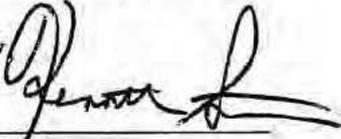
Kenneth Steiner  
\*\*\*

To whom it may concern,

Mr. John Chevedden is authorized to submit rule 14a-8 proposals on these topics for the 2021 proxy season:

Simple majority vote  
Annual election of each director (declassify)  
Director Majority Vote Std.  
Shareholder called Special Meetings  
Shareholder Written Consent  
Independent Board Chair

Sincerely,



Kenneth Steiner

11-10-20

Date