

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Before the
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934
Release No. 98076 / August 8, 2023

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEEDING
File No. 3-21552

In the Matter of

**Wells Fargo Securities, LLC,
Wells Fargo Clearing Services,
LLC, and Wells Fargo
Advisors Financial Network,
LLC,**

Respondents.

**ORDER INSTITUTING ADMINISTRATIVE
AND CEASE-AND-DESIST PROCEEDINGS
PURSUANT TO SECTIONS 15(b) AND 21C
OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF
1934, MAKING FINDINGS, AND IMPOSING
REMEDIAL SANCTIONS AND A CEASE-
AND-DESIST ORDER**

I.

The Securities and Exchange Commission (“Commission”) deems it appropriate and in the public interest that public administrative and cease-and-desist proceedings be, and hereby are, instituted pursuant to Sections 15(b) and 21C of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (“Exchange Act”), against Wells Fargo Securities, LLC, Wells Fargo Clearing Services, LLC, and Wells Fargo Advisors Financial Network, LLC (collectively “Respondents” or “Wells Fargo”).

II.

In anticipation of the institution of these proceedings, Respondents have submitted Offers of Settlement (“Offers”) that the Commission has determined to accept. Respondents admit the facts set forth in Section III below, acknowledge that their conduct violated the federal securities laws, admit the Commission’s jurisdiction over them and the subject matter of these proceedings and consent to the entry of this Order Instituting Administrative and Cease-and-Desist Proceedings Pursuant to Sections 15(b) and 21C of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, Making Findings, and Imposing Remedial Sanctions and a Cease-and-Desist Order (“Order”), as set forth below.

III.

On the basis of this Order and Respondents' Offers, the Commission finds¹ that:

Summary

1. The federal securities laws impose recordkeeping requirements on broker-dealers to ensure that they responsibly discharge their crucial role in our markets. The Commission has long said that compliance with these requirements is essential to investor protection and the Commission's efforts to further its mandate of protecting investors, maintaining fair, orderly, and efficient markets, and facilitating capital formation.

2. These proceedings arise out of the widespread and longstanding failure of Respondents' employees and affiliated representatives ("personnel") throughout Wells Fargo, including at senior levels, to adhere to certain of these essential requirements and the Respondents' own policies. Using their personal devices, these personnel communicated both internally and externally by personal text messaging platforms ("off-channel communications").

3. From January 2019 to September 2022, Respondents' personnel sent and received off-channel communications that related to the business of the broker-dealers operated by Respondents. Respondents did not maintain or preserve the substantial majority of these written communications. Respondents' failure was firm-wide, and involved personnel at all levels of authority. As a result, Respondents violated Section 17(a) of the Exchange Act and Rule 17a-4(b)(4) thereunder.

4. Respondents' supervisors, who were responsible for supervising junior personnel, routinely communicated off-channel using their personal devices. In fact, managing directors and senior supervisors responsible for supervising junior personnel, themselves failed to comply with Respondents' policies by communicating using non-approved methods on their personal devices about the Respondents' broker-dealer business.

5. Respondents' widespread failure to implement their policies and procedures that prohibit such communications led to their failure to reasonably supervise their personnel within the meaning of Section 15(b)(4)(E) of the Exchange Act.

6. During the time period that Respondents failed to maintain and preserve off-channel communications their personnel sent and received related to the broker-dealers' business, Respondents received and responded to Commission subpoenas for documents and records requests in numerous Commission investigations. As a result, Respondents' recordkeeping failures likely impacted the Commission's ability to carry out its regulatory functions and investigate violations of the federal securities laws across these investigations.

¹ The findings herein are made pursuant to Respondents' Offers of Settlement and are not binding on any other person or entity in this or any other proceeding.

7. Commission staff uncovered Respondents' misconduct after commencing a risk-based initiative to investigate the use of off-channel and unpreserved communications at broker-dealers. Respondents have initiated a review of their recordkeeping failures and begun a program of remediation. As set forth in the Undertakings below, Respondents will retain an independent compliance consultant to review and assess the Respondents' remedial steps relating to Respondents' recordkeeping practices, policies and procedures, related supervisory practices, and employment actions.

Respondents

8. Wells Fargo Securities, LLC, is a Delaware company with its principal office in Charlotte, North Carolina and is registered with the Commission as a broker-dealer. It is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Wells Fargo & Company, a global financial services firm incorporated in Delaware and headquartered in San Francisco, California.

9. Wells Fargo Clearing Services, LLC, is a Delaware company with its principal office in St. Louis, Missouri and is registered with the Commission as a broker-dealer and investment adviser. It is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Wells Fargo & Company.

10. Wells Fargo Advisors Financial Network, LLC, is a Delaware company with its principal office in St. Louis, Missouri and is registered with the Commission as a broker-dealer and investment adviser. It is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Wells Fargo & Company.

Recordkeeping Requirements under the Exchange Act

11. Section 17(a)(1) of the Exchange Act authorizes the Commission to issue rules requiring broker-dealers to make and keep for prescribed periods, and furnish copies of, such records as necessary or appropriate in the public interest, for the protection of investors or otherwise in furtherance of the purposes of the Exchange Act.

12. The Commission adopted Rule 17a-4 pursuant to this authority. Rule 17a-4 specifies the manner and length of time that the records created in accordance with other Commission rules, and certain other records produced by broker-dealers, must be maintained and produced promptly to Commission representatives. The rules adopted under Section 17(a)(1) of the Exchange Act, including Rule 17a-4(b)(4), require that broker-dealers preserve in an easily accessible place originals of all communications received and copies of all communications sent relating to the firm's business as such. These rules impose minimum recordkeeping requirements that are based on standards a prudent broker-dealer should follow in the normal course of business.

13. The Commission previously has stated that these and other recordkeeping requirements "are an integral part of the investor protection function of the Commission, and other securities regulators, in that the preserved records are the primary means of monitoring compliance with applicable securities laws, including antifraud provisions and financial responsibility standards." Commission Guidance to Broker-Dealers on the Use of Electronic Storage Media under the Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act of 2000 with Respect to Rule 17a-4(f), 17 C.F.R. Part 241, Exchange Act Rel. No. 44238 (May 1, 2001).

Respondents' Policies and Procedures

14. Respondents maintained certain policies and procedures designed to ensure the retention of business-related records, including electronic communications, in compliance with the relevant recordkeeping provisions.

15. Respondents' personnel were advised that the use of unapproved electronic communications methods, including on their personal devices, was not permitted, and they should not use personal email, chats, or text-messaging applications for business purposes, or forward work-related communications to their personal applications.

16. Messages sent through the Respondents' approved communications methods were monitored, subject to review, and, when appropriate, archived. Messages sent through unapproved communications methods, such as iMessage on personnel's personal devices, were not monitored, subject to review, or archived.

17. Respondents' policies were designed to address supervisors' supervision of personnel's training in the Respondents' communications policies and adherence to Respondents' books and recordkeeping requirements. Supervisory policies notified personnel that electronic communications were subject to surveillance by Respondents. Respondents had procedures for all personnel, including supervisors, requiring annual self-attestation of compliance.

18. Respondents, however, failed to implement a system of follow-up and review to determine that their supervisors were reasonably following the Respondents' policies. While permitting personnel to use approved communications methods, including on personal phones, for business communications, Respondents failed to implement sufficient monitoring to assure that their recordkeeping and communications policies were being followed.

Respondents' Recordkeeping Failures Across Their Brokerage Business

19. Beginning in September 2021, the Commission staff commenced a risk-based initiative to investigate whether broker-dealers were properly retaining business-related messages sent and received on personal devices. Respondents cooperated with the investigation by gathering communications from the personal devices of an array of senior and other broker-dealer personnel. These personnel included senior business unit leadership, investment bankers, and other senior executives and employees.

20. The Commission staff's investigation uncovered pervasive off-channel communications at various seniority levels of Respondents' broker-dealers. The staff requested off-channel communications data from a sampling of broker-dealer personnel and found that substantially all of the individuals had engaged in at least some level of off-channel communications that numbered from less than 100 to over a thousand text messages during a two to three year period. Overall, these personnel sent and received off-channel communications, involving other Wells Fargo personnel, Wells Fargo's broker-dealer customers, and other participants in the securities industry. Within Wells Fargo, significant numbers of industry group

heads, lead and senior lead investment bankers, and other executives participated in off-channel communications.

21. From January 2019 through September 2022, thousands of messages were sent and received that concerned Respondents' broker-dealer business, including investment strategy, discussions of investment banking client meetings, and communications about market color, analysis, activity trends or events. For example, a head of an investment banking unit and a lead trader in investment banking sent and received more than one thousand off channel business-related messages to Wells Fargo colleagues, investment banking clients, and personnel at other financial services firms. Other Wells Fargo executives similarly sent hundreds of text messages. Within Wells Fargo, such executives routinely communicated using off-channel communications with other managing directors and junior personnel under their supervision.

22. Overall, the voluminous off-channel messages uncovered by the staff's risk-based initiative reflect extensive discussion between and among senior-level Wells Fargo executives and employees, customers, investment banking clients, third-party advisers, and other market participants about debt and equity underwriting and trading issues.

Respondents' Failure to Preserve Required Records Potentially Compromised and Delayed Commission Matters

23. Between January 2019 and September 2022, Respondents received and responded to Commission subpoenas for documents and records requests in numerous Commission investigations. By failing to maintain and preserve required records relating to their broker-dealer business, Respondents likely deprived the Commission of these off-channel communications in various investigations.

Respondents' Violations and Failure to Supervise

24. As a result of the conduct described above, from at least January 2019 through September 2022, Respondents willfully² violated Section 17(a) of the Exchange Act and Rule 17a-4(b)(4) thereunder, which require broker-dealers to preserve for at least three years originals of all communications received and copies of all communications sent relating to their business as such.

25. As a result of the conduct described above, Respondents failed reasonably to supervise their personnel with a view to preventing or detecting certain of their personnel's aiding and abetting violations of Section 17(a) of the Exchange Act and Rule 17a-4(b)(4) thereunder, within the meaning of Section 15(b)(4)(E) of the Exchange Act.

² "Willfully," for purposes of imposing relief under Section 15(b) of the Exchange Act, "means no more than that the person charged with the duty knows what he is doing." *Wonsover v. SEC*, 205 F.3d 408, 414 (D.C. Cir. 2000) (quoting *Hughes v. SEC*, 174 F.2d 969, 977 (D.C. Cir. 1949)).

Respondents' Remedial Efforts

26. In determining to accept the Respondents' Offers, the Commission considered remedial steps promptly undertaken by Respondents and cooperation afforded the Commission staff.

Undertakings

27. Prior to this action, Respondents enhanced their policies and procedures, and increased training concerning the use of approved communications methods, including on personal devices, and began implementing significant changes to the technology available to employees and other personnel. In addition, Respondents have undertaken to:

28. **Compliance Consultant.**

a. Respondents shall retain, within thirty (30) days of the entry of this Order, the services of an independent compliance consultant ("Compliance Consultant") that is not unacceptable to the Commission staff. The Compliance Consultant's compensation and expenses shall be borne exclusively by Respondents.

b. Respondents will oversee the work of the Compliance Consultant.

c. Respondents shall provide to the Commission staff, within sixty (60) days of the entry of this Order, a copy of the engagement letter detailing the Compliance Consultant's responsibilities, which shall include a comprehensive compliance review as described below. Respondents shall require that, within ninety (90) days of the date of the engagement letter, the Compliance Consultant conduct:

- i. A comprehensive review of Respondents' supervisory, compliance, and other policies and procedures designed to ensure that Respondents' electronic communications, including those found on personal electronic devices, including without limitation, cellular phones ("Personal Devices"), are preserved in accordance with the requirements of the federal securities laws.
- ii. A comprehensive review of training conducted by Respondents to ensure personnel are complying with the requirements regarding the preservation of electronic communications, including those found on Personal Devices, in accordance with the requirements of the federal securities laws, including by ensuring that Respondents' personnel certify in writing on a quarterly basis that they are complying with preservation requirements.
- iii. An assessment of the surveillance program measures implemented by Respondents to ensure compliance, on an ongoing basis, with the requirements found in the federal securities laws to preserve electronic communications, including those found on Personal Devices.

- iv. An assessment of the technological solutions that Respondents have begun implementing to meet the record retention requirements of the federal securities laws, including an assessment of the likelihood that Respondents' personnel will use the technological solutions going forward and a review of the measures employed by Respondents to track employee usage of new technological solutions.
- v. An assessment of the measures used by Respondents to prevent the use of unauthorized communications methods for business communications by employees. This assessment should include, but not be limited to, a review of Respondents' policies and procedures to ascertain if they provide for any significant technology and/or behavioral restrictions that help prevent the risk of the use of unapproved communications methods on Personal Devices (e.g., trading floor restrictions).
- vi. A review of Respondents' electronic communications surveillance routines to ensure that electronic communications through approved communications methods found on Personal Devices are incorporated into Respondents' overall communications surveillance program.
- vii. A comprehensive review of the framework adopted by Respondents to address instances of non-compliance by Respondents' employees with Respondents' policies and procedures concerning the use of Personal Devices to communicate about Respondents' business in the past. This review shall include a survey of how Respondents determined which employees failed to comply with Respondents' policies and procedures, the corrective action carried out, an evaluation of who violated policies and why, what penalties were imposed, and whether penalties were handed out consistently across business lines and seniority levels.

d. Respondents shall require that, within forty-five (45) days after completion of the review set forth in sub-paragraphs c.i. through c.vii. above, the Compliance Consultant shall submit a detailed written report of its findings to Respondents and to the Commission staff (the "Report"). Respondents shall require that the Report include a description of the review performed, the names of the individuals who performed the review, the conclusions reached, the Compliance Consultant's recommendations for changes in or improvements to Respondents' policies and procedures, and a summary of the plan for implementing the recommended changes in or improvements to Respondents' policies and procedures.

e. Respondents shall adopt all recommendations contained in the Report within ninety (90) days of the date of the Report; provided, however, that within forty-five (45) days after the date of the Report, Respondents shall advise the Compliance Consultant and the Commission staff in writing of any recommendations that Respondents consider to be unduly burdensome, impractical, or inappropriate. With respect to any recommendation that Respondents consider unduly burdensome, impractical, or inappropriate, Respondents

need not adopt such recommendation at that time, but shall propose in writing an alternative policy, procedure, or disclosure designed to achieve the same objective or purpose.

f. As to any recommendation concerning Respondents' policies or procedures on which Respondents and the Compliance Consultant do not agree, Respondents and the Compliance Consultant shall attempt in good faith to reach an agreement within sixty (60) days after the date of the Report. Within fifteen (15) days after the conclusion of the discussion and evaluation by Respondents and the Compliance Consultant, Respondents shall require that the Compliance Consultant inform Respondents and the Commission staff in writing of the Compliance Consultant's final determination concerning any recommendation that Respondents consider to be unduly burdensome, impractical, or inappropriate. Respondents shall abide by the determinations of the Compliance Consultant and, within sixty (60) days after final agreement between Respondents and the Compliance Consultant or final determination by the Compliance Consultant, whichever occurs first, Respondents shall adopt and implement all of the recommendations that the Compliance Consultant deems appropriate.

g. Respondents shall cooperate fully with the Compliance Consultant and shall provide the Compliance Consultant with access to such of Respondents' files, books, records, and personnel as are reasonably requested by the Compliance Consultant for review.

h. Respondents shall not have the authority to terminate the Compliance Consultant or substitute another compliance consultant for the initial Compliance Consultant, without the prior written approval of the Commission staff. Respondents shall compensate the Compliance Consultant and persons engaged to assist the Compliance Consultant for services rendered under this Order at their reasonable and customary rates.

i. For the period of engagement and for a period of two years from completion of the engagement, Respondents shall not (i) retain the Compliance Consultant for any other professional services outside of the services described in this Order; (ii) enter into any other professional relationship with the Compliance Consultant, including any employment, consultant, attorney-client, auditing or other professional relationship; or (iii) enter, without prior written consent of the Commission staff, into any such professional relationship with any of the Compliance Consultant's present or former affiliates, employers, directors, officers, employees, or agents acting in their capacity as such.

j. The Report submitted by the Compliance Consultant will likely include confidential financial, proprietary, competitive business or commercial information. Public disclosure of the Report could discourage cooperation, impede pending or potential government investigations or undermine the objectives of the reporting requirement. For these reasons, among others, the Report and the contents thereof are intended to remain and shall remain non-public, except (1) pursuant to court order, (2) as agreed to by the parties in writing, (3) to the extent that the Commission determines in its sole discretion that

disclosure would be in furtherance of the Commission's discharge of its duties and responsibilities, or (4) is otherwise required by law.

29. One-Year Evaluation. Respondents shall require the Compliance Consultant to assess Respondents' program for the preservation, as required under the federal securities laws, of electronic communications, including those found on Personal Devices, commencing one year after submitting the Report required by Paragraph 28.d above. Respondents shall require this review to evaluate Respondents' progress in the areas described in Paragraph 28.c.i-vii above. After this review, Respondents shall require the Compliance Consultant to submit a report (the "One Year Report") to Respondents and the Commission staff and shall ensure that the One Year Report includes an updated assessment of Respondents' policies and procedures with regard to the preservation of electronic communications (including those found on Personal Devices), training, surveillance programs, and technological solutions implemented in the prior year period.

30. Reporting Discipline Imposed. For two years following the entry of this Order, Respondents shall notify the Commission staff as follows upon the imposition of any discipline imposed by Respondents, including, but not limited to, written warnings, loss of any pay, bonus, or incentive compensation, or the termination of employment, with respect to any employee found to have violated Respondents' policies and procedures concerning the preservation of electronic communications, including those found on Personal Devices: at least 48 hours before the filing of a Form U-5, or within ten (10) days of the imposition of other discipline.

31. Internal Audit. In addition to the Compliance Consultant's review and issuance of the One Year Report, Respondents will also have their Internal Audit function conduct a separate audit(s) to assess Respondents' progress in the areas described in Paragraph 28.c.i-vii above. After completion of this audit(s), Respondents shall ensure that Internal Audit submits a report to Respondents and the Commission staff.

32. Recordkeeping. Respondents shall preserve, for a period of not less than six (6) years from the end of the fiscal year last used, the first two (2) years in an easily accessible place, any record of compliance with these undertakings.

33. Deadlines. For good cause shown, the Commission staff may extend any of the procedural dates relating to the undertakings. Deadlines for procedural dates shall be counted in calendar days, except that if the last day falls on a weekend or federal holiday, the next business day shall be considered to be the last day.

34. Certification. Respondents shall certify, in writing, compliance with the undertakings set forth above. The certification shall identify the undertakings, provide written evidence of compliance in the form of a narrative, and be supported by exhibits sufficient to demonstrate compliance. The Commission staff may make reasonable requests for further evidence of compliance, and Respondents agree to provide such evidence. The certification and supporting material shall be submitted to Jason H. Lee, Associate Regional Director, Securities and Exchange Commission, 44 Montgomery Street, Suite 2800, San Francisco, California, 94104, with a copy to the Office of Chief Counsel of the Enforcement Division, no later than sixty (60) days from the date of the completion of the undertakings.

IV.

In view of the foregoing, the Commission deems it appropriate and in the public interest to impose the sanctions agreed to in Respondents' Offers.

Accordingly, pursuant to Sections 15(b) and 21C of the Exchange Act, it is hereby ORDERED that:

- A. Respondents cease and desist from committing or causing any violations and any future violations of Section 17(a) of the Exchange Act and Rule 17a-4 thereunder.
- B. Respondents are censured.
- C. Respondents shall comply with the undertakings enumerated in paragraphs 28 to 34 above.
- D. Respondents, jointly and severally, shall, within 14 days of the entry of this Order, pay a civil money penalty in the amount of \$125,000,000 to the Securities and Exchange Commission for transfer to the general fund of the United States Treasury, subject to Exchange Act Section 21F(g)(3). If timely payment is not made, additional interest shall accrue pursuant to 31 U.S.C. § 3717.

Payment must be made in one of the following ways:

- (1) Respondents may transmit payment electronically to the Commission, which will provide detailed ACH transfer/Fedwire instructions upon request;
- (2) Respondents may make direct payment from a bank account via [Pay.gov](http://www.pay.gov) through the SEC website at <http://www.sec.gov/about/offices/ofm.htm>; or
- (3) Respondents may pay by certified check, bank cashier's check, or United States postal money order, made payable to the Securities and Exchange Commission and hand-delivered or mailed to:

Enterprise Services Center
Accounts Receivable Branch
HQ Bldg., Room 181, AMZ-341
6500 South MacArthur Boulevard
Oklahoma City, OK 73169

Payments by check or money order must be accompanied by a cover letter identifying Wells Fargo Securities, LLC, Wells Fargo Clearing Services, LLC, and Wells Fargo Advisors Financial Network, LLC as Respondents in these proceedings, and the file number of these proceedings; a copy of the cover letter and check or money order must be sent to Jason H. Lee, Associate

Regional Director, Securities and Exchange Commission, 44 Montgomery Street, Suite 2800, San Francisco, CA, 94104.

E. Amounts ordered to be paid as civil money penalties pursuant to this Order shall be treated as penalties paid to the government for all purposes, including all tax purposes. To preserve the deterrent effect of the civil penalty, Respondents agree that in any Related Investor Action, they shall not argue that they are entitled to, nor shall they benefit by, offset or reduction of any award of compensatory damages by the amount of any part of Respondents' payment of a civil penalty in this action ("Penalty Offset"). If the court in any Related Investor Action grants such a Penalty Offset, Respondents agree that they shall, within 30 days after entry of a final order granting the Penalty Offset, notify the Commission's counsel in this action and pay the amount of the Penalty Offset to the Securities and Exchange Commission. Such a payment shall not be deemed an additional civil penalty and shall not be deemed to change the amount of the civil penalty imposed in this proceeding. For purposes of this paragraph, a "Related Investor Action" means a private damages action brought against Respondents by or on behalf of one or more investors based on substantially the same facts as alleged in the Order instituted by the Commission in this proceeding.

By the Commission.

Vanessa A. Countryman
Secretary