BEFORE THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION WASHINGTON, DC REGE - ED
MAY 10 2016
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

In the Matter of the Application of

Rogelio Guevara



For Review of Disciplinary Action Taken by

Financial Industry Regulatory Authority

File No. 3-17211

FINRA'S MOTION TO DISMISS GUEVARA'S APPLICATION FOR REVIEW AND TO STAY BRIEFING SCHEDULE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Financial Industry Regulatory Authority ("FINRA") moves to dismiss the application for review filed by Rogelio Guevara ("Guevara"). The Commission should dismiss this application for two independent reasons. First, Guevara's application for review is untimely. Guevara filed this appeal at least two weeks after the 30-day appeal deadline expired. The Commission should follow its previous decisions on strict compliance with the appeal deadline and dismiss Guevara's application for review.

Second, Guevara failed to exhaust his administrative remedies. FINRA properly sent a series of letters that warned him that he would be suspended and eventually barred unless he provided FINRA with the information it had requested. Guevara repeatedly failed to respond to FINRA's notices of proceedings against him. As a result, FINRA's numerous notices went unanswered, FINRA's investigation was at a dead-end, and Guevara was barred. While Guevara now provides FINRA with what appears to be the requested information in his application for

review, by failing to request a hearing before FINRA or seeking reinstatement based on full compliance, Guevara forfeited his right to appeal this action to the Commission. Thus, the Commission should dismiss Guevara's application for review for failing to exhaust his administrative remedies.¹

II. PROCEDURAL AND FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Guevara was an associated person of Northwestern Mutual Investment Services, LLC ("Northwestern" or "Firm"), a FINRA member firm, as a registered investment company products/variable contracts representative. (RP 12.)² On August 14, 2015, the Firm filed a Uniform Termination Notice for Securities Industry Registration ("Form U5") and reported that Guevara "was permitted to resign while under internal review for making premium payments from his personal bank account for several non-variable life insurance policy clients." (RP 12.) The Firm's Form U5 filing triggered an investigation by FINRA to determine whether Guevara violated FINRA rules.

A. FINRA's First Request Letter

About a month after the Form U5 filing, on September 15, 2015, Stephanie Sofer, a FINRA investigator, sent Guevara a letter requesting information pursuant to FINRA Rule

Pursuant to Commission Rule of Practice 161, FINRA requests that the Commission stay issuance of a briefing schedule in this matter while this motion is pending. 17 C.F.R. § 201.161. The Commission should first evaluate the dispositive arguments that Guevara's appeal should be dismissed on procedural grounds before it reaches the underlying substance of this appeal.

² "RP ___" refers to the page numbers in the certified record filed by FINRA on May 9, 2016.

8210.³ (RP 1-2.) The letter sought information concerning the Firm's investigation of Guevara's actions, and asked him to provide a signed statement responding to the allegations and copies of documentation related to the matter, including his personal bank statements. (RP 1.) The letter further asked Guevara to confirm whether there were any complaints regarding his employment at the Firm that were open or resolved within the previous three years of the date of his termination, and if so, to provide additional documentation. (RP 1.) The letter requested that Guevara to provide a written response to FINRA by September 29, 2015. (RP 1.) The letter informed Guevara that, among other things, he was obligated to respond "fully, promptly, and without qualification" to FINRA's request, and warned that "[a]ny failure on [his] part to satisfy these obligations could expose [him] to sanctions, including a permanent bar from the securities industry." (RP 1.)

Sofer sent the letter by certified mail, electronic return receipt requested and first-class mail to Guevara's address of record reported in the Central Registration Depository ("CRD"[®]), 9301 WH Burges, El Paso, TX, 79925 (the "CRD Address"). (RP 1, 4, 11.) The certified mail tracking information states that the certified mailing was delivered and refused on September 19, 2015, and ultimately returned to FINRA. (RP 4.) The U.S. Postal Service did not return the first-class mailing. Guevara did not respond to FINRA's Rule 8210 request for information.

B. FINRA's Second Request Letter

On October 5, 2015, Sofer sent a second letter pursuant to FINRA Rule 8210 requesting the information. (RP 5-7.) The second letter included a copy of FINRA's first request letter

FINRA Rule 8210 provides that FINRA staff has the right to require members, persons associated with a member, and other persons subject to FINRA's jurisdiction "to provide information orally, in writing, or electronically . . . with respect to any matter involved" in an investigation, complaint, examination or proceeding. FINRA Rule 8210(a)(1).

dated September 15, 2015, was sent to Guevara by certified mail, electronic return receipt requested and first-class mail to the CRD Address, and set a response deadline of October 19, 2015. (RP 5-9.) The certified mailing was returned as "undelivered." (RP 9.) The U.S. Postal Service did not return the letter sent by first-class mail. Again, Guevara did not respond to FINRA's second request for information.

C. The November 20, 2015 Pre-Suspension Notice

After Guevara failed to respond to the two requests for information, FINRA's

Department of Enforcement ("Enforcement") commenced an expedited proceeding to suspend

Guevara from associating with any FINRA firm in accordance with FINRA Rule 9552(a).⁴ On

November 20, 2015, Sandra J. Harris ("Harris"), Senior Director, Policy & Expedited

Proceedings for Enforcement warned Guevara in a letter ("Pre-Suspension Notice") that FINRA intended to suspend him on December 14, 2015 for his failure to respond to the two Rule 8210 requests for information.⁵ (RP 23-27.)

The Pre-Suspension Notice stated that Guevara could avoid imposition of the suspension if he took corrective action by complying with the information requests before the suspension date of December 14, 2015. (RP 23.) The Pre-Suspension Notice explained that Guevara had the opportunity to request a hearing pursuant to FINRA Rule 9552(e), which, if made before the

FINRA Rule 9552(a) states that "[i]f a member, person associated with a member or person subject to FINRA's jurisdiction fails to provide any information, report, material, data, or testimony requested or required to be filed pursuant to the FINRA By-Laws or FINRA rules, or fails to keep its membership application or supporting documents current, FINRA staff may provide written notice to such member or person specifying the nature of the failure and stating that the failure to take corrective action within 21 days after service of the notice will result in suspension of membership or of association of the person with any member."

The Pre-Suspension Notice also included copies of the September 15 and October 5, 2015 requests for information that Sofer sent. (RP 25-27.)

suspension date, would stay the effective date of any suspension.⁶ (RP 23.) The Pre-Suspension Notice further explained that Guevara could seek reinstatement during his suspension, and stressed that if he failed to request termination of the suspension within three months, he would be automatically barred on February 23, 2016. (RP 24.)

FINRA sent the Pre-Suspension Notice to Guevara's CRD Address by certified mail return receipt requested and first-class mail.⁷ (RP 23, 28.) The record includes a copy of an electronic return receipt referencing tracking information. (RP 28.) Neither mailing was returned. Guevara did not respond to the Pre-Suspension Notice, and he did not answer FINRA's outstanding requests for information.

D. The December 15, 2015 Suspension Notice

On December 15, 2015, Harris, on behalf of Enforcement, notified Guevara in a letter ("Suspension Notice") that he was suspended, effective immediately, from association with any FINRA firm in any capacity. (RP 29.) The Suspension Notice advised Guevara that he could file a written request for termination of the suspension on grounds of fully complying with the information requests. (RP 29.) It also reiterated the warning that if Guevara failed to seek relief from the suspension he would be automatically barred on February 23, 2016. (RP 29.)

FINRA sent the Suspension Notice to the CRD Address by certified mail, electronic return receipt requested and first-class mail. (RP 29-30.) The U.S Postal Service did not return the certified or first-class mailings. Guevara did not respond to the Suspension Notice.

The Pre-Suspension Notice provided Guevara with the address of FINRA's Office of Hearing Officers where he could direct a request for a hearing. (RP 23.)

FINRA searched a public records database in LexisNexis on November 10 and November 20, 2015 and confirmed that, as of November 20, 2015, Guevara's current mailing address was the CRD address to which Harris sent the Pre-Suspension Notice. (RP 19, 21.)

E. The February 23, 2016 Bar Notice

Guevara did not challenge his suspension in the months leading up to February 23, 2016. Accordingly, on that date, Harris notified Guevara by letter that he was barred from association with any FINRA member in any capacity in accordance with FINRA Rule 9552(h) ("Bar Notice").⁸ (RP 33-34.) FINRA sent the Bar Notice to the CRD address by certified mail, electronic return receipt requested and first-class mail.⁹ (RP 33-34.) Again, the U.S. Postal Service did not return the certified mailing or the first-class letter.

On April 14, 2016, seven weeks after he was barred, Guevara submitted an application for review to the Commission. (RP 37-190.) Guevara claims that he was unaware of the Firm's Form U5 filing—including the Firm's allegations that he made insurance premium payments from his own personal bank account—and states that he was under the impression that he was allowed to resign. (RP 37.) Guevara also states that his residential address had changed since April 2015. (RP 37.) Guevara further states that he was made aware of FINRA's investigation when he "applied for an appointment with Prudential Life [and he] was denied." (RP 37.)

FINRA Rule 9552(h) states, "[a] member or person who is suspended under this Rule and fails to request termination of the suspension within three months of issuance of the original notice of suspension will automatically be expelled or barred."

A public records database in LexisNexis confirmed that, as of February 23, 2016, Guevara's current mailing address was the CRD address to which Harris sent the Bar Notice. (RP 31.)

The application for review includes an undated statement from Karla Carrillo representing that, as the new resident at the CRD address, Guevara never received FINRA's notices because he had changed his address. (RP 40.)

III. ARGUMENT

The Commission should dismiss Guevara's application for review because Guevara submitted his application for review well after the 30-day appeal deadline and thus is untimely. In addition, Guevara failed to exhaust his administrative remedies by responding to FINRA's requests within the given time parameters or requesting a hearing. FINRA undisputedly provided Guevara with proper notice of his expedited proceeding. Although Guevara in his application states that he changed his residential address, he was required to update his CRD record to reflect the new address. Guevara failed to do so. In fact, Guevara *still* has not updated his CRD record to reflect his current address. His blatant failure to keep his CRD record current, as required by FINRA rules, does not excuse Guevara's failure to respond to FINRA's requests on a timely basis. Because of Guevara's independent failures, numerous letters and notices sent from FINRA went unanswered. He failed to follow FINRA procedures and did not ask for a hearing or contest his suspension. Guevara thus failed to exhaust his administrative remedies. On either grounds, the Commission should dismiss the appeal.

A. Guevara's Application for Review is Untimely

Section 19(d)(2) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 ("Exchange Act") provides that any person aggrieved by a final disciplinary sanction imposed by a self-regulatory organization has 30 days to file an appeal after the date the notice of the self-regulatory organization's determination was filed with the SEC and received by the aggrieved person, or "within such longer period as [the SEC] may determine." 15 U.S.C. § 78s(d)(2). SEC Rule of Practice 420 is the "exclusive remedy" for seeking an extension of the 30-day appeal period. 17 C.F.R. § 201.420(b). That rule provides that the Commission will allow the filing of a late application for

review only upon "a showing of extraordinary circumstances." *Robert M. Ryerson*, Exchange Act Release No. 57839, 2008 SEC LEXIS 1153, at *7 & n.9 (May 20, 2008).

Guevara's appeal is untimely and the Commission should dismiss it. Harris sent the bar letter to Guevara on February 23, 2016. The date Guevara was served is three days after the mailing date or February 26, 2016. The Commission acknowledged receipt of Guevara's application on April 14, 2016 (RP 191), which is well past the 30-day appeal deadline, and Guevara has presented no extraordinary circumstances warranting an exception. In similar circumstances, the Commission has declined to review late applications for review. *See e.g. John Vincent Ballard*, Exchange Act Release No. 77452, 2016 SEC LEXIS 1151, at *7 (Mar. 25, 2016) (dismissing respondent's application for review as untimely when filed 21 days after FINRA's final action). As the Commission has held, "strict compliance with [the] filing deadlines facilitates finality and encourages parties to act timely in seeking relief." *Id.* at *9. Accordingly, the Commission should dismiss Guevara's appeal because it is untimely.

B. Guevara Failed to Exhaust His Administrative Remedies

Separately, the Commission should follow established precedent and not consider Guevara's application for review because he failed to exhaust administrative remedies that were available to him. As the Commission previously has held, it "will not consider an application for review from FINRA disciplinary action if the applicant failed to exhaust FINRA's procedures for contesting the sanction at issue." *Aliza A. Manzella*, Exchange Act Release No. 77084, 2016 SEC LEXIS 464, at *9-10 (Feb. 8, 2016) (dismissing application for review where respondent failed to avail herself of administrative remedies and FINRA barred her for failure to respond to

See FINRA Rules 9559(b) and 9138(c) (providing additional time for service by mail).

FINRA's Rule 8210 request) (internal quotations omitted). The precedent in this area is well-settled. *Gerald J. Lodovico*, Exchange Act Release No. 73748, 2014 SEC LEXIS 4732, at *7 (Dec. 4, 2014) (dismissing appeal because respondent failed to exhaust FINRA's administrative remedies); *Caryl Trewyn Lenahan*, Exchange Act Release No. 73146, 2014 SEC LEXIS 3503, at *6 (Sept. 19, 2014) (same); *Mark Steven Steckler*, Exchange Act Release No. 71391, 2014 SEC LEXIS 283, at *8 (Jan. 24, 2014) (same); *Gregory S. Profeta*, Exchange Act Release No. 62055, 2010 SEC LEXIS 1563, at *5, 8 (May 6, 2010) (same); *Jeffrey A. King*, 58 S.E.C. 839, 843-45 (2005) (same); *Lee Gura*, 57 S.E.C. 972, 976-77 (2004) (same); *David I. Cassuto*, 56 S.E.C. 565, 570 (2003) (dismissing appeal because "applicant failed to follow NASD procedures"); *Gary A. Fox*, 55 S.E.C. 1147, 1149 (2002) (same).

An aggrieved party—such as Guevara—is required to exhaust his administrative remedies before resorting to an appeal. As the Commission has held, the exhaustion requirement "promotes the efficient resolution of disciplinary disputes between SROs and their members." *Marcos A. Santana*, Exchange Act Release No. 74138, 2015 SEC LEXIS 312, at *9 (Jan. 26, 2015). Those who fail to exercise their rights to administrative review cannot claim that they have exhausted their administrative remedies. *Royal Sec. Corp.*, 36 S.E.C. 275, 277 n.3 (1955).

As set forth below, Guevara failed repeatedly to comply with FINRA rules and procedures, did not challenge his suspension, and ultimately, did not contest FINRA's bar until seven weeks after FINRA imposed it. He was obligated under FINRA rules to keep CRD updated with his current address and failed to do so. Consequently, Guevara did not respond timely to FINRA's requests for information and, after FINRA sent several notices that went unanswered, he was barred. The Commission should dismiss Guevara's appeal for his failure to exhaust his administrative remedies.

1. FINRA Provided Guevara Proper Notice of His Proceeding

It is undisputed, and the record unequivocally demonstrates, that FINRA properly served Guevara with the first and second request letters, the Pre-Suspension Notice, the Suspension Notice, and the Bar Notice. (RP 3-4, 8-9, 28, 30, 35.) Indeed, Guevara included copies of the Rule 8210 letters and Bar Notice with his application for review. (RP 45-56.)

The notice provision under FINRA Rule 8210(d) governs service of FINRA's request letters, stating that "[w]ith respect to a person subject to FINRA's jurisdiction who was formerly associated with a member," a request under FINRA Rule 8210 shall be deemed received by the person at the "last known residential address of the person as reflected in the Central Registration Depository." FINRA Rule 9134(b)(1) governs service of notices of suspension in FINRA Rule 9552 proceedings and provides that "[p]apers served on a natural person may be served at the natural person's residential address, as reflected in the [CRD], if applicable." 12

In accordance with FINRA rules, the request letters and notices were sent to Guevara's CRD address by first-class and certified mail as evidenced in the record, and neither mailings were returned. Thus, FINRA complied with the service requirement and properly notified Guevara of this proceeding.

2. Guevara Failed to Update His CRD Address

Guevara does not dispute that he received FINRA's communications. Guevara states that he changed his address in April 2015 and, because he was under the impression that he was permitted to resign from the Firm in August 2015, he was unaware of FINRA's communications

See also FINRA Rule 9134(a)(2), which provides that service is permissible by "mailing the papers through the U.S. Postal Service by using first class mail [or] first class certified mail."

until recently. (RP 37.) Guevara's claim, however, does not explain why he did not update his CRD address.

As the Commission has previously held, a respondent's failure to update CRD with a current mailing address is "no defense to a failure to respond." *See Ricky D. Mullins*, Exchange Act Release No. 71926, 2014 SEC LEXIS 1268, at *13 (Apr. 10, 2014). When Guevara became a registered person of a FINRA member, he agreed to comply with FINRA rules, including providing certain identifying information to FINRA on the Uniform Application for Securities Industry Registration or Transfer ("Form U4"), such as his mailing address.

To facilitate communication between FINRA and its members, Form U4 requires associated persons, like Guevara, to amend and update information on the form as changes occur, including any changes to the applicant's residential address. Pursuant to its Bylaws, FINRA retains jurisdiction up to two years from the date a person ceases to be associated with a FINRA member. While FINRA maintains jurisdiction, it may request information pursuant to Rule 8210 to investigate whether any previously registered individual has violated FINRA rules. In this effort, FINRA rules make clear that even persons whose registration is terminated must continue to notify FINRA when their current mailing address changes. *See NASD Notice to Members 97-31* (May 1997) (reminding persons no longer registered with a member of the

See Form U4 Uniform Application for Securities Industry Registration or Transfer, at 1 (May 2009), available at https://www.finra.org/file/form-u4-instructions ("An individual is under a continuing obligation to amend and update information required by Form U4 as changes occur."); see also Santana, 2015 SEC LEXIS 312, at *4 (stating that as part of the registration process, associated persons agree by filing the Form U4 that they will "keep a current address on file with FINRA at all times.").

See FINRA By-Laws, Article V, Section 4(a) (stating that an associated person that is no longer registered shall continue to be subject to FINRA rules and shall continue to provide information requested by FINRA pursuant to its rules for up to two years after the date the person ceases to be registered).

requirement to keep their mailing address current in CRD for at least two years after termination of registration). 15

FINRA properly sent all correspondence to Guevara's CRD Address. *See Gilbert Torres Martinez*, Exchange Act Release No. 69405, 2013 SEC LEXIS 1147, at *4 n.6 (Apr. 18, 2013) (stating that a "notice issued pursuant to Rule 8210 is deemed received by such person when mailed to the individual's last known CRD address"); *Edward J. Jakubik, Jr.*, Exchange Act Release No. 61541, 2010 SEC LEXIS 1014, at *16 (Feb. 18, 2010) (finding that applicant was deemed to have received FINRA's default decision when properly served to his CRD address). Guevara, on the other hand, failed in his obligation to keep his CRD address current—which ultimately caused his bar.

Guevara states that he was unaware of the Firm's Form U5 filing that disclosed his making insurance premium payments on behalf of Firm clients. (RP 37.) Guevara's lack of awareness of the Firm's filing, however, is not the source of the problem. Regardless of his impressions of the circumstances surrounding his termination, it was Guevara's—and not the Firm's—responsibility to update CRD with his current address. Instead, Guevara did nothing to ensure he received FINRA's communications in a timely fashion. Since April 2015, Guevara could have notified FINRA of his new address; instead, he ignored his duty to keep his CRD record current. To date, Guevara still has not updated CRD to reflect his current address.

See also CRD Residential Change of Address—Former FINRA Registered Representatives, available at http://www.finra.org/industry/web-crd/crd-residential-change-address-former-finra-registered-representatives (stating that "former registered representatives are required to report residential address changes to FINRA for two years following their termination date or last Form U5 amendment" and permitting individuals to update their residential address information in CRD online to streamline the process).

Guevara's failure to understand his obligation under FINRA rules to keep his CRD address current, however, is not a reason to reverse FINRA's action.¹⁶

3. Guevara's Response to FINRA's Requests is Past the Deadline

In his application for review, Guevara provides what appears to be a response to FINRA's requests for information. (RP 57-166.) He also expresses his willingness to cooperate and provide additional information that might be needed in connection with FINRA's investigation. (RP 39.) Guevara's efforts now to respond to FINRA's requests are—simply put—too late.

"When members and associated persons delay their responses to requests for information, they impede the ability of NASD to conduct its investigations fully and expeditiously." *Paz Securities, Inc.*, 58 S.E.C. 859, 871 (2005), *remanded on other grounds*, 494 F.3d 1059 (D.C. Cir. 2007). FINRA set deadlines for Guevara to respond to the two Rule 8210 request letters on September 29 and October 19, 2015, respectively. (RP 1, 5.) Both of these dates have come and past. FINRA then provided Guevara with additional opportunities to avoid his suspension and, after additional notice, set a final deadline of February 23, 2016. Guevara took no action, and accordingly, he was barred. (RP 33-34.)

Guevara's supply of documents and information now in efforts to comply with FINRA's requests is far beyond the last deadline that FINRA gave to Guevara. The Commission should not consider Guevara's response because to do so would undermine the finality of FINRA's

Indeed, the Commission repeatedly has held that ignorance of FINRA requirements is no excuse for violative behavior. See Scott Epstein, Exchange Act Release No. 59328, 2009 SEC LEXIS 217, at *73-74 (Jan. 30, 2009), aff'd, 416 F. App'x 142 (2010); Thomas C. Kocherhans, 52 S.E.C. 528, 531 (1995) ("Participants in the securities industry must take responsibility for compliance with regulatory requirements and cannot be excused for lack of knowledge, understanding, or appreciation of these requirements").

proceedings. See Lance E. Van Alstyne, 53 S.E.C. 1093, 1098 (1998) (holding "parties to administrative proceedings have an interest in knowing when decisions are final and on which decisions their reliance can be placed").

IV. CONCLUSION

The Commission should dismiss Guevara's application for review because it is untimely, or because he failed to exhaust his administrative remedies.

Respectfully submitted,

Ву:

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May 9, 2016

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Lisa Jones Toms, certify that on this 9th day of May, 2016, I caused the original and three copies of the Motion to Dismiss and to Stay Briefing Schedule in the matter of <u>Application for Review of Rogelio Guevara</u>, Administrative Proceeding No. 3-17211, to be served by messenger on:

Brent J. Fields, Secretary Securities and Exchange Commission 100 F St., NE Washington, DC 20549-1090

and via overnight FedEx on:

Rogelio Guevara

Rogelio Guevara

Different methods of service were used because courier service could not be provided to Guevara.

Respectfully submitted,

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May 9, 2016

VIA MESSENGER

Brent J. Fields Secretary Securities and Exchange Commission 100 F Street, N.E. Washington, DC 20549-1090

RE:

In the Matter of the Application of Rogelio Guevara

Administrative Proceeding No. 3-17211

Dear Mr. Fields:

Enclosed please find the original and three copies of the FINRA's Motion to Dismiss Guevara's Application for Review and to Stay Briefing Schedule in the abovecaptioned matter.

Please contact me at (202) 728-8044 if you have any questions.

Very truly yours,

Lisa Jones Toms

cc:

Rogelio Guevara

Brennan Love