

TO: Thomas Botsko, Chair, Capital Adequacy (E) Task Force  
Rachel Hemphill, Chair, Life Actuarial (A) Task Force  
Philip Barlow, Chair, Risk-Based Capital Investment Risk and Evaluation (E) Working Group

FROM: Carrie Mears, Chair, Valuation of Securities (E) Task Force

CC: Charles A. Therriault, Director, NAIC Securities Valuation Office (SVO)  
Marc Perlman, Managing Investment Counsel, NAIC Securities Valuation Office (SVO)  
Eric Kolchinsky, Director, NAIC Structured Securities Group (SSG) and Capital Markets Bureau  
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Scott O'Neal, Life Actuary, NAIC Financial Regulatory Affairs  
Eva Yeung, Sr. P/C RBC Analyst/Technical Lead, NAIC Financial Regulatory Affairs

RE: Referral regarding a Proposed Purposes and Procedures Manual (P&P Manual) Amendment to Define and Add Guidance for Structured Equity and Funds

DATE: February 3, 2023

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**Summary** – The SVO has processed several private letter rating (PLR) filings for investments in notes issued by special purpose vehicles or other legal entities that operate as feeder funds which themselves then invest, directly or indirectly, in one or more funds or other equity investments. The SVO proposes defining these investments as Structured Equity and Fund investments.<sup>1</sup> The SVO proposed at the 2022 Fall National Meeting the removal of Structured Equity and Fund investments from Filing Exemption, the reliance upon a credit rating provider (CRP) ratings for the assignment of NAIC Designations. The SVO is concerned about this general structure for the following reasons:

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<sup>1</sup> Proposed Definition: A Structured Equity and Fund investment is a note issued by, or equity or limited partnership interest in, a special purpose vehicle, trust, limited liability company, limited partnership, or other legal entity type, as issuer, the contractually promised payments of which are wholly dependent, directly or indirectly, upon payments or distributions from one or more underlying equity or fund investments. The inclusion of an intervening legal entity or entities between the Structured Equity and Fund investment issuer and the underlying equity or fund(s), does not change the risk that the insurer investment is ultimately dependent, in whole or in part, upon an investment in equity or one or more funds and its underlying investments. Any design that circumvents this definition, and related examples, through technical means but which in substance achieves the same ends or poses the same risk, shall be deemed a Structured Equity and Fund.

- 1) Circumvent Regulatory Guidance - The introduction of an intervening entity as debt issuer, when the underlying investment is in substance an equity investment, circumvents regulatory guidance established by the Valuation of Securities (E) Task Force, the Statutory Accounting Principles (E) Working Group and the Capital Adequacy (E) Task Force for the reporting of equity investments because, according to the P&P Manual (i) equity and fund investments are ineligible to use credit rating provider (CRP) ratings in the assignment of an NAIC Designation and (ii), in the case of funds, only the SVO is tasked with determining whether a fund produces fixed-income like cash flows and is therefore eligible for specific classification.

**All non-SEC registered funds are required to be reported on Schedule BA. Life insurance entities are permitted to file investments in non-SEC registered private equity funds, partnerships, limited liability companies and joint ventures with the SVO for specific classification on Schedule BA;**

- 2) Reliance on Ratings - These investments are being reported as bonds and receiving bond risk-based capital (RBC) factors based upon the mechanical assignment of NAIC Designations that rely upon CRP ratings through the filing exempt process. The use of CRP ratings would not be permitted for the fund or equity investments which underly these notes if the equity or fund investments were held directly;
- 3) RBC / Investment Limit Arbitrage - The structure may permit in-substance equity and fund investments to obtain better RBC treatment than would otherwise be received if the investments had been directly reported. In addition to improved RBC treatment, the structures could permit entities to hold more underlying equity / fund investments than would be permitted under state investment law; and
- 4) Transparency - The structures typically use two or more interconnected private entities through which the privately rated "bond" securities are issued that are backed by investments in non-public assets. The many non-public layers deny regulators, and possibly insurer investors, transparency into the true underlying risks, credit exposure and nature of the investment. The notes issued are described generically as a "senior note" or "term loan" further obscuring their actual structure and complexity. These structures can invest in any asset including affiliate investments, non-fixed income investments, derivatives, borrowings for the purpose of leverage and non-admitted assets.

It is possible that many of the transactions the SVO has processed would not qualify as bonds eligible for Schedule D-1 reporting according to the principles-based bond definition currently being drafted by the Statutory Accounting Principles (E) Working Group, while others likely will qualify. The bond definition requires a review of the substance of the investment to determine whether it has the substance of a bond; significantly, that the ultimate underlying collateral has fixed income cash flows. In either case, however, the use of a fund intermediary has the potential to be abused and requires significant judgment to understand the substance and nature of the ultimate underlying risk. This has already been recognized by the establishment of processes for the SVO to provide NAIC Designations for fixed-income-like funds. It would then follow that debt instruments backed by the types of funds that would ordinarily be required to be filed with the SVO, should follow the same process.

**Informational Referral** – Given the magnitude of the multiple regulatory arbitrage opportunities, the judgment involved in assessing the nature of the ultimate risk, the lack of transparency, circumvention of regulatory guidance and the reliance on CRP ratings to accomplish these ends, the SVO proposed amending the P&P Manual to include a definition for Structured Equity and Fund and to exclude such investments from Filing Exemption eligibility. The proposed amendment would not change how the investment is classified for reporting by the insurer but it would ensure that the NAIC Designation and Category assigned are appropriate for the risk. This is an informational referral and no direct action is required by the Capital Adequacy (E) Task Force, Life Actuarial (A) Task Force or Risk-based Capital Investment Risk and Evaluation (E) Working Group unless those groups wish to comment on the proposal.

Please contact Charles Therriault or Marc Perlman with any questions.

<https://naiconline.sharepoint.com/teams/SVOVOSTaskForce/Shared Documents/Meetings/2023/Referrals/To CATF LATF RBCIRE/VOSTF Referral to CATF LATF RBCIRE - Structured Equity and Funds 2022-02-03.docx>