

RISK-BASED CREDIT EXAMINATION ACT

JULY 20, 2022.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

Ms. WATERS, from the Committee on Financial Services,
 submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 4586]

The Committee on Financial Services, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 4586) to amend the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 with respect to risk-based examinations of Nationally Recognized Statistical Rating Organizations, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment and recommends that the bill as amended do pass.

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The amendment is as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Risk-Based Credit Examination Act”.

SEC. 2. CONDUCT OF RISK-BASED EXAMINATIONS OF NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED STATISTICAL RATING ORGANIZATIONS.

Section 15E(p)(3)(B) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (15 U.S.C. 78o-7(p)(3)(B)) is amended in the matter preceding clause (i), by inserting “, as appropriate,” after “Each examination under subparagraph (A) shall include”.

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

On July 20, 2021, Representative Wagner introduced H.R. 4586, the “Risk-Based Credit Examination Act”, which would provide discretion to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to prioritize its examination process of credit rating agencies as it deems appropriate. It does not remove the requirement that the SEC examine credit rating agencies annually.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

SEC currently examines all SEC-registered nationally recognized statistical rating organizations (NRSROs) annually. This examination process includes a review of Congressionally mandated components, including whether the NRSRO appropriately manages conflicts of interest, has adequate internal supervisory controls, and processing of complaints. This requirement to review every component delineated in the Dodd-Frank Act (at least nine distinct components) has caused the SEC to repeatedly examine for areas of operations of the NRSROs that do not undergo changes year-to-year, causing the SEC to ineffectively expend resources. The bill would give discretion to the SEC to prioritize the components of this annual review based on risk.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title

- This section establishes the short title of the bill as “Risk-Based Credit Examination Act.”

Section 2. Risk-based examinations of nationally recognized statistical rating organizations

- This section amends Section 15E(p)(3)(B) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 to authorize the commission to prioritize its annual examination of nationally recognized statistical rating organizations as appropriate.

HEARINGS

The Committee on Financial Services did not convene a hearing to consider H.R. 4586.

COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

The Committee on Financial Services met in open session on June 22, 2022 and ordered H.R. 4586 to be reported favorably to the House with an amendment in the nature of a substitute by a voice vote, a quorum being present.

COMMITTEE VOTES AND ROLL CALL VOTES

In compliance with clause 3(b) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee advises that no roll call votes occurred during the Committee's consideration of H.R. 4586.

STATEMENT OF OVERSIGHT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

In compliance with clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII and clause 2(b)(1) of rule X of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee's oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the descriptive portions of this report.

STATEMENT OF PERFORMANCE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Pursuant to clause (3)(c) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the goals of H.R. 4586 are to provide discretion to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to prioritize its examination process of credit rating agencies as it deems appropriate, without removing the requirement that the SEC examine credit rating agencies annually.

NEW BUDGET AUTHORITY AND CBO COST ESTIMATE

Pursuant to clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and section 308(a) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, and pursuant to clause 3(c)(3) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee has requested an estimate from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office. CBO was unable to provide an estimate in a timely manner.

COMMITTEE COST ESTIMATE

Clause 3(d)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives requires an estimate and a comparison of the costs that would be incurred in carrying out H.R. 4586. After careful review, including discussions with the Congressional Budget Office, the Committee estimates that H.R. 4586 would have an insignificant impact on spending.

UNFUNDED MANDATE STATEMENT

Pursuant to Section 423 of the *Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act* (as amended by Section 101(a)(2) of the *Unfunded Mandates Reform Act*, Pub. L. 104-4), the Committee adopts its own the estimate of federal mandates regarding H.R. 4586, as amended.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

No advisory committees within the meaning of section 5(b) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act were created by this legislation.

APPLICATION OF LAW TO THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Pursuant to section 102(b)(3) of the *Congressional Accountability Act*, Pub. L. No. 104-1, H.R. 4586, as amended, does not apply to

terms and conditions of employment or to access to public services or accommodations within the legislative branch.

EARMARK STATEMENT

In accordance with clause 9 of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives, H.R. 4586 does not contain any congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as described in clauses 9(e), 9(f), and 9(g) of rule XXI.

DUPLICATION OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Pursuant to clause 3(c)(5) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee states that no provision of H.R. 4586 establishes or reauthorizes a program of the Federal Government known to be duplicative of another federal program, a program that was included in any report from the Government Accountability Office to Congress pursuant to section 21 of Public Law 111–139, or a program related to a program identified in the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance.

CHANGES TO EXISTING LAW

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, H.R. 4586, as reported, are shown as follows:

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (new matter is printed in italics and existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934

TITLE I—REGULATION OF SECURITIES EXCHANGES

* * * * *

SEC. 15E. REGISTRATION OF NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED STATISTICAL RATING ORGANIZATIONS.

(a) REGISTRATION PROCEDURES.—

(1) APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—A credit rating agency that elects to be treated as a nationally recognized statistical rating organization for purposes of this title (in this section referred to as the “applicant”), shall furnish to the Commission an application for registration, in such form as the Commission shall require, by rule or regulation issued in accordance with subsection (n), and containing the information described in subparagraph (B).

(B) REQUIRED INFORMATION.—An application for registration under this section shall contain information regarding—

(i) credit ratings performance measurement statistics over short-term, mid-term, and long-term periods (as applicable) of the applicant;

(ii) the procedures and methodologies that the applicant uses in determining credit ratings;

(iii) policies or procedures adopted and implemented by the applicant to prevent the misuse, in violation of this title (or the rules and regulations hereunder), of material, nonpublic information;

(iv) the organizational structure of the applicant;

(v) whether or not the applicant has in effect a code of ethics, and if not, the reasons therefor;

(vi) any conflict of interest relating to the issuance of credit ratings by the applicant;

(vii) the categories described in any of clauses (i) through (v) of section 3(a)(62)(B) with respect to which the applicant intends to apply for registration under this section;

(viii) on a confidential basis, a list of the 20 largest issuers and subscribers that use the credit rating services of the applicant, by amount of net revenues received therefrom in the fiscal year immediately preceding the date of submission of the application;

(ix) on a confidential basis, as to each applicable category of obligor described in any of clauses (i) through (v) of section 3(a)(62)(B), written certifications described in subparagraph (C), except as provided in subparagraph (D); and

(x) any other information and documents concerning the applicant and any person associated with such applicant as the Commission, by rule, may prescribe as necessary or appropriate in the public interest or for the protection of investors.

(C) WRITTEN CERTIFICATIONS.—Written certifications required by subparagraph (B)(ix)—

(i) shall be provided from not fewer than 10 qualified institutional buyers, none of which is affiliated with the applicant;

(ii) may address more than one category of obligors described in any of clauses (i) through (v) of section 3(a)(62)(B);

(iii) shall include not fewer than 2 certifications for each such category of obligor; and

(iv) shall state that the qualified institutional buyer—

(I) meets the definition of a qualified institutional buyer under section 3(a)(64); and

(II) has used the credit ratings of the applicant for at least the 3 years immediately preceding the date of the certification in the subject category or categories of obligors.

(D) EXEMPTION FROM CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENT.—A written certification under subparagraph (B)(ix) is not required with respect to any credit rating agency which has received, or been the subject of, a no-action letter from the staff of the Commission prior to August 2, 2006, stating that such staff would not recommend enforcement action against any broker or dealer that considers credit ratings

issued by such credit rating agency to be ratings from a nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(E) LIMITATION ON LIABILITY OF QUALIFIED INSTITUTIONAL BUYERS.—No qualified institutional buyer shall be liable in any private right of action for any opinion or statement expressed in a certification made pursuant to subparagraph (B)(ix).

(2) REVIEW OF APPLICATION.—

(A) INITIAL DETERMINATION.—Not later than 90 days after the date on which the application for registration is furnished to the Commission under paragraph (1) (or within such longer period as to which the applicant consents) the Commission shall—

(i) by order, grant such registration for ratings in the subject category or categories of obligors, as described in clauses (i) through (v) of section 3(a)(62)(B); or

(ii) institute proceedings to determine whether registration should be denied.

(B) CONDUCT OF PROCEEDINGS.—

(i) CONTENT.—Proceedings referred to in subparagraph (A)(ii) shall—

(I) include notice of the grounds for denial under consideration and an opportunity for hearing; and

(II) be concluded not later than 120 days after the date on which the application for registration is furnished to the Commission under paragraph (1).

(ii) DETERMINATION.—At the conclusion of such proceedings, the Commission, by order, shall grant or deny such application for registration.

(iii) EXTENSION AUTHORIZED.—The Commission may extend the time for conclusion of such proceedings for not longer than 90 days, if it finds good cause for such extension and publishes its reasons for so finding, or for such longer period as to which the applicant consents.

(C) GROUNDS FOR DECISION.—The Commission shall grant registration under this subsection—

(i) if the Commission finds that the requirements of this section are satisfied; and

(ii) unless the Commission finds (in which case the Commission shall deny such registration) that—

(I) the applicant does not have adequate financial and managerial resources to consistently produce credit ratings with integrity and to materially comply with the procedures and methodologies disclosed under paragraph (1)(B) and with subsections (g), (h), (i), and (j); or

(II) if the applicant were so registered, its registration would be subject to suspension or revocation under subsection (d).

(3) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION.—Subject to section 24, the Commission shall, by rule, require a nationally recognized statistical rating organization, upon the granting of reg-

istration under this section, to make the information and documents submitted to the Commission in its completed application for registration, or in any amendment submitted under paragraph (1) or (2) of subsection (b), publicly available on its website, or through another comparable, readily accessible means, except as provided in clauses (viii) and (ix) of paragraph (1)(B).

(b) UPDATE OF REGISTRATION.—

(1) UPDATE.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall promptly amend its application for registration under this section if any information or document provided therein becomes materially inaccurate, except that a nationally recognized statistical rating organization is not required to amend—

(A) the information required to be filed under subsection (a)(1)(B)(i) by filing information under this paragraph, but shall amend such information in the annual submission of the organization under paragraph (2) of this subsection; or

(B) the certifications required to be provided under subsection (a)(1)(B)(ix) by filing information under this paragraph.

(2) CERTIFICATION.—Not later than 90 days after the end of each calendar year, each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall file with the Commission an amendment to its registration, in such form as the Commission, by rule, may prescribe as necessary or appropriate in the public interest or for the protection of investors—

(A) certifying that the information and documents in the application for registration of such nationally recognized statistical rating organization (other than the certifications required under subsection (a)(1)(B)(ix)) continue to be accurate; and

(B) listing any material change that occurred to such information or documents during the previous calendar year.

(c) ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RATINGS PROCEDURES.—

(1) AUTHORITY.—The Commission shall have exclusive authority to enforce the provisions of this section in accordance with this title with respect to any nationally recognized statistical rating organization, if such nationally recognized statistical rating organization issues credit ratings in material contravention of those procedures relating to such nationally recognized statistical rating organization, including procedures relating to the prevention of misuse of nonpublic information and conflicts of interest, that such nationally recognized statistical rating organization—

(A) includes in its application for registration under subsection (a)(1)(B)(ii); or

(B) makes and disseminates in reports pursuant to section 17(a) or the rules and regulations thereunder.

(2) LIMITATION.—The rules and regulations that the Commission may prescribe pursuant to this title, as they apply to nationally recognized statistical rating organizations, shall be narrowly tailored to meet the requirements of this title applicable to nationally recognized statistical rating organizations. Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, or any

other provision of law, neither the Commission nor any State (or political subdivision thereof) may regulate the substance of credit ratings or the procedures and methodologies by which any nationally recognized statistical rating organization determines credit ratings. Nothing in this paragraph may be construed to afford a defense against any action or proceeding brought by the Commission to enforce the antifraud provisions of the securities laws.

(3) INTERNAL CONTROLS OVER PROCESSES FOR DETERMINING CREDIT RATINGS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall establish, maintain, enforce, and document an effective internal control structure governing the implementation of and adherence to policies, procedures, and methodologies for determining credit ratings, taking into consideration such factors as the Commission may prescribe, by rule.

(B) ATTESTATION REQUIREMENT.—The Commission shall prescribe rules requiring each nationally recognized statistical rating organization to submit to the Commission an annual internal controls report, which shall contain—

- (i) a description of the responsibility of the management of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization in establishing and maintaining an effective internal control structure under subparagraph (A);
- (ii) an assessment of the effectiveness of the internal control structure of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization; and
- (iii) the attestation of the chief executive officer, or equivalent individual, of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(d) CENSURE, DENIAL, OR SUSPENSION OF REGISTRATION; NOTICE AND HEARING.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Commission, by order, shall censure, place limitations on the activities, functions, or operations of, suspend for a period not exceeding 12 months, or revoke the registration of any nationally recognized statistical rating organization, or with respect to any person who is associated with, who is seeking to become associated with, or, at the time of the alleged misconduct, who was associated or was seeking to become associated with a nationally recognized statistical rating organization, the Commission, by order, shall censure, place limitations on the activities or functions of such person, suspend for a period not exceeding 1 year, or bar such person from being associated with a nationally recognized statistical rating organization, if the Commission finds, on the record after notice and opportunity for hearing, that such censure, placing of limitations, suspension, bar or revocation is necessary for the protection of investors and in the public interest and that such nationally recognized statistical rating organization, or any person associated with such an organization, whether prior to or subsequent to becoming so associated—

(A) has committed or omitted any act, or is subject to an order or finding, enumerated in subparagraph (A), (D), (E),

(H), or (G) of section 15(b)(4), has been convicted of any offense specified in section 15(b)(4)(B), or is enjoined from any action, conduct, or practice specified in subparagraph (C) of section 15(b)(4), during the 10-year period preceding the date of commencement of the proceedings under this subsection, or at any time thereafter;

(B) has been convicted during the 10-year period preceding the date on which an application for registration is filed with the Commission under this section, or at any time thereafter, of—

(i) any crime that is punishable by imprisonment for 1 or more years, and that is not described in section 15(b)(4)(B); or

(ii) a substantially equivalent crime by a foreign court of competent jurisdiction;

(C) is subject to any order of the Commission barring or suspending the right of the person to be associated with a nationally recognized statistical rating organization;

(D) fails to file the certifications required under subsection (b)(2);

(E) fails to maintain adequate financial and managerial resources to consistently produce credit ratings with integrity;

(F) has failed reasonably to supervise, with a view to preventing a violation of the securities laws, an individual who commits such a violation, if the individual is subject to the supervision of that person.

(2) SUSPENSION OR REVOCATION FOR PARTICULAR CLASS OF SECURITIES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Commission may temporarily suspend or permanently revoke the registration of a nationally recognized statistical rating organization with respect to a particular class or subclass of securities, if the Commission finds, on the record after notice and opportunity for hearing, that the nationally recognized statistical rating organization does not have adequate financial and managerial resources to consistently produce credit ratings with integrity.

(B) CONSIDERATIONS.—In making any determination under subparagraph (A), the Commission shall consider—

(i) whether the nationally recognized statistical rating organization has failed over a sustained period of time, as determined by the Commission, to produce ratings that are accurate for that class or subclass of securities; and

(ii) such other factors as the Commission may determine.

(e) TERMINATION OF REGISTRATION.—

(1) VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL.—A nationally recognized statistical rating organization may, upon such terms and conditions as the Commission may establish as necessary in the public interest or for the protection of investors, withdraw from registration by furnishing a written notice of withdrawal to the Commission.

(2) COMMISSION AUTHORITY.—In addition to any other authority of the Commission under this title, if the Commission finds that a nationally recognized statistical rating organization is no longer in existence or has ceased to do business as a credit rating agency, the Commission, by order, shall cancel the registration under this section of such nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(f) REPRESENTATIONS.—

(1) BAN ON REPRESENTATIONS OF SPONSORSHIP BY UNITED STATES OR AGENCY THEREOF.—It shall be unlawful for any nationally recognized statistical rating organization to represent or imply in any manner whatsoever that such nationally recognized statistical rating organization has been designated, sponsored, recommended, or approved, or that the abilities or qualifications thereof have in any respect been passed upon, by the United States or any agency, officer, or employee thereof.

(2) BAN ON REPRESENTATION AS NRSRO OF UNREGISTERED CREDIT RATING AGENCIES.—It shall be unlawful for any credit rating agency that is not registered under this section as a nationally recognized statistical rating organization to state that such credit rating agency is a nationally recognized statistical rating organization registered under this title.

(3) STATEMENT OF REGISTRATION UNDER SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934 PROVISIONS.—No provision of paragraph (1) shall be construed to prohibit a statement that a nationally recognized statistical rating organization is a nationally recognized statistical rating organization under this title, if such statement is true in fact and if the effect of such registration is not misrepresented.

(g) PREVENTION OF MISUSE OF NONPUBLIC INFORMATION.—

(1) ORGANIZATION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall establish, maintain, and enforce written policies and procedures reasonably designed, taking into consideration the nature of the business of such nationally recognized statistical rating organization, to prevent the misuse in violation of this title, or the rules or regulations hereunder, of material, nonpublic information by such nationally recognized statistical rating organization or any person associated with such nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(2) COMMISSION AUTHORITY.—The Commission shall issue final rules in accordance with subsection (n) to require specific policies or procedures that are reasonably designed to prevent misuse in violation of this title (or the rules or regulations hereunder) of material, nonpublic information.

(h) MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST.—

(1) ORGANIZATION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall establish, maintain, and enforce written policies and procedures reasonably designed, taking into consideration the nature of the business of such nationally recognized statistical rating organization and affiliated persons and affiliated companies thereof, to address and manage any conflicts of interest that can arise from such business.

(2) COMMISSION AUTHORITY.—The Commission shall issue final rules in accordance with subsection (n) to prohibit, or require the management and disclosure of, any conflicts of interest relating to the issuance of credit ratings by a nationally recognized statistical rating organization, including, without limitation, conflicts of interest relating to—

(A) the manner in which a nationally recognized statistical rating organization is compensated by the obligor, or any affiliate of the obligor, for issuing credit ratings or providing related services;

(B) the provision of consulting, advisory, or other services by a nationally recognized statistical rating organization, or any person associated with such nationally recognized statistical rating organization, to the obligor, or any affiliate of the obligor;

(C) business relationships, ownership interests, or any other financial or personal interests between a nationally recognized statistical rating organization, or any person associated with such nationally recognized statistical rating organization, and the obligor, or any affiliate of the obligor;

(D) any affiliation of a nationally recognized statistical rating organization, or any person associated with such nationally recognized statistical rating organization, with any person that underwrites the securities or money market instruments that are the subject of a credit rating; and

(E) any other potential conflict of interest, as the Commission deems necessary or appropriate in the public interest or for the protection of investors.

(3) SEPARATION OF RATINGS FROM SALES AND MARKETING.—

(A) RULES REQUIRED.—The Commission shall issue rules to prevent the sales and marketing considerations of a nationally recognized statistical rating organization from influencing the production of ratings by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(B) CONTENTS OF RULES.—The rules issued under subparagraph (A) shall provide for—

(i) exceptions for small nationally recognized statistical rating organizations with respect to which the Commission determines that the separation of the production of ratings and sales and marketing activities is not appropriate; and

(ii) suspension or revocation of the registration of a nationally recognized statistical rating organization, if the Commission finds, on the record, after notice and opportunity for a hearing, that—

(I) the nationally recognized statistical rating organization has committed a violation of a rule issued under this subsection; and

(II) the violation of a rule issued under this subsection affected a rating.

(4) LOOK-BACK REQUIREMENT.—

(A) REVIEW BY THE NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED STATISTICAL RATING ORGANIZATION.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall establish, maintain, and en-

force policies and procedures reasonably designed to ensure that, in any case in which an employee of a person subject to a credit rating of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization or the issuer, underwriter, or sponsor of a security or money market instrument subject to a credit rating of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization was employed by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization and participated in any capacity in determining credit ratings for the person or the securities or money market instruments during the 1-year period preceding the date an action was taken with respect to the credit rating, the nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall—

(i) conduct a review to determine whether any conflicts of interest of the employee influenced the credit rating; and

(ii) take action to revise the rating if appropriate, in accordance with such rules as the Commission shall prescribe.

(B) REVIEW BY COMMISSION.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—The Commission shall conduct periodic reviews of the policies described in subparagraph (A) and the implementation of the policies at each nationally recognized statistical rating organization to ensure they are reasonably designed and implemented to most effectively eliminate conflicts of interest.

(ii) TIMING OF REVIEWS.—The Commission shall review the code of ethics and conflict of interest policy of each nationally recognized statistical rating organization—

(I) not less frequently than annually; and

(II) whenever such policies are materially modified or amended.

(5) REPORT TO COMMISSION ON CERTAIN EMPLOYMENT TRANSITIONS.—

(A) REPORT REQUIRED.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall report to the Commission any case such organization knows or can reasonably be expected to know where a person associated with such organization within the previous 5 years obtains employment with any obligor, issuer, underwriter, or sponsor of a security or money market instrument for which the organization issued a credit rating during the 12-month period prior to such employment, if such employee—

(i) was a senior officer of such organization;

(ii) participated in any capacity in determining credit ratings for such obligor, issuer, underwriter, or sponsor; or

(iii) supervised an employee described in clause (ii).

(B) PUBLIC DISCLOSURE.—Upon receiving such a report, the Commission shall make such information publicly available.

(i) PROHIBITED CONDUCT.—

(1) PROHIBITED ACTS AND PRACTICES.—The Commission shall issue final rules in accordance with subsection (n) to prohibit any act or practice relating to the issuance of credit ratings by a nationally recognized statistical rating organization that the Commission determines to be unfair, coercive, or abusive, including any act or practice relating to—

(A) conditioning or threatening to condition the issuance of a credit rating on the purchase by the obligor or an affiliate thereof of other services or products, including pre-credit rating assessment products, of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization or any person associated with such nationally recognized statistical rating organization;

(B) lowering or threatening to lower a credit rating on, or refusing to rate, securities or money market instruments issued by an asset pool or as part of any asset-backed or mortgage-backed securities transaction, unless a portion of the assets within such pool or part of such transaction, as applicable, also is rated by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization; or

(C) modifying or threatening to modify a credit rating or otherwise departing from its adopted systematic procedures and methodologies in determining credit ratings, based on whether the obligor, or an affiliate of the obligor, purchases or will purchase the credit rating or any other service or product of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization or any person associated with such organization.

(2) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in paragraph (1), or in any rules or regulations adopted thereunder, may be construed to modify, impair, or supersede the operation of any of the antitrust laws (as defined in the first section of the Clayton Act, except that such term includes section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act, to the extent that such section 5 applies to unfair methods of competition).

(j) DESIGNATION OF COMPLIANCE OFFICER.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall designate an individual responsible for administering the policies and procedures that are required to be established pursuant to subsections (g) and (h), and for ensuring compliance with the securities laws and the rules and regulations thereunder, including those promulgated by the Commission pursuant to this section.

(2) LIMITATIONS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subparagraph (B), an individual designated under paragraph (1) may not, while serving in the designated capacity—

- (i) perform credit ratings;
- (ii) participate in the development of ratings methodologies or models;
- (iii) perform marketing or sales functions; or
- (iv) participate in establishing compensation levels, other than for employees working for that individual.

(B) EXCEPTION.—The Commission may exempt a small nationally recognized statistical rating organization from

the limitations under this paragraph, if the Commission finds that compliance with such limitations would impose an unreasonable burden on the nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(3) OTHER DUTIES.—Each individual designated under paragraph (1) shall establish procedures for the receipt, retention, and treatment of—

(A) complaints regarding credit ratings, models, methodologies, and compliance with the securities laws and the policies and procedures developed under this section; and

(B) confidential, anonymous complaints by employees or users of credit ratings.

(4) COMPENSATION.—The compensation of each compliance officer appointed under paragraph (1) shall not be linked to the financial performance of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization and shall be arranged so as to ensure the independence of the officer's judgment.

(5) ANNUAL REPORTS REQUIRED.—

(A) ANNUAL REPORTS REQUIRED.—Each individual designated under paragraph (1) shall submit to the nationally recognized statistical rating organization an annual report on the compliance of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization with the securities laws and the policies and procedures of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization that includes—

(i) a description of any material changes to the code of ethics and conflict of interest policies of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization; and

(ii) a certification that the report is accurate and complete.

(B) SUBMISSION OF REPORTS TO THE COMMISSION.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall file the reports required under subparagraph (A) together with the financial report that is required to be submitted to the Commission under this section.

(k) STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL CONDITION.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall, on a confidential basis, file with the Commission, at intervals determined by the Commission, such financial statements, certified (if required by the rules or regulations of the Commission) by an independent public accountant, and information concerning its financial condition, as the Commission, by rule, may prescribe as necessary or appropriate in the public interest or for the protection of investors.

(l) SOLE METHOD OF REGISTRATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—On and after the effective date of this section, a credit rating agency may only be registered as a nationally recognized statistical rating organization for any purpose in accordance with this section.

(2) PROHIBITION ON RELIANCE ON NO-ACTION RELIEF.—On and after the effective date of this section—

(A) an entity that, before that date, received advice, approval, or a no-action letter from the Commission or staff thereof to be treated as a nationally recognized statistical rating organization pursuant to the Commission rule at section 240.15c3-1 of title 17, Code of Federal Regulations,

may represent itself or act as a nationally recognized statistical rating organization only—

(i) during Commission consideration of the application, if such entity has filed an application for registration under this section; and

(ii) on and after the date of approval of its application for registration under this section; and

(B) the advice, approval, or no-action letter described in subparagraph (A) shall be void.

(3) NOTICE TO OTHER AGENCIES.—Not later than 30 days after the date of enactment of this section, the Commission shall give notice of the actions undertaken pursuant to this section to each Federal agency which employs in its rules and regulations the term “nationally recognized statistical rating organization” (as that term is used under Commission rule 15c3–1 (17 C.F.R. 240.15c3–1), as in effect on the date of enactment of this section).

(m) ACCOUNTABILITY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The enforcement and penalty provisions of this title shall apply to statements made by a credit rating agency in the same manner and to the same extent as such provisions apply to statements made by a registered public accounting firm or a securities analyst under the securities laws, and such statements shall not be deemed forward-looking statements for the purposes of section 21E.

(2) RULEMAKING.—The Commission shall issue such rules as may be necessary to carry out this subsection.

(n) REGULATIONS.—

(1) NEW PROVISIONS.—Such rules and regulations as are required by this section or are otherwise necessary to carry out this section, including the application form required under subsection (a)—

(A) shall be issued by the Commission in final form, not later than 270 days after the date of enactment of this section; and

(B) shall become effective not later than 270 days after the date of enactment of this section.

(2) REVIEW OF EXISTING REGULATIONS.—Not later than 270 days after the date of enactment of this section, the Commission shall—

(A) review its existing rules and regulations which employ the term “nationally recognized statistical rating organization” or “NRSRO”; and

(B) amend or revise such rules and regulations in accordance with the purposes of this section, as the Commission may prescribe as necessary or appropriate in the public interest or for the protection of investors.

(o) NRSROS SUBJECT TO COMMISSION AUTHORITY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—No provision of the laws of any State or political subdivision thereof requiring the registration, licensing, or qualification as a credit rating agency or a nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall apply to any nationally recognized statistical rating organization or person employed by or working under the control of a nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(2) LIMITATION.—Nothing in this subsection prohibits the securities commission (or any agency or office performing like functions) of any State from investigating and bringing an enforcement action with respect to fraud or deceit against any nationally recognized statistical rating organization or person associated with a nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(p) REGULATION OF NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED STATISTICAL RATING ORGANIZATIONS.—

(1) ESTABLISHMENT OF OFFICE OF CREDIT RATINGS.—

(A) OFFICE ESTABLISHED.—The Commission shall establish within the Commission an Office of Credit Ratings (referred to in this subsection as the “Office”) to administer the rules of the Commission—

(i) with respect to the practices of nationally recognized statistical rating organizations in determining ratings, for the protection of users of credit ratings and in the public interest;

(ii) to promote accuracy in credit ratings issued by nationally recognized statistical rating organizations; and

(iii) to ensure that such ratings are not unduly influenced by conflicts of interest.

(B) DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE.—The head of the Office shall be the Director, who shall report to the Chairman.

(2) STAFFING.—The Office established under this subsection shall be staffed sufficiently to carry out fully the requirements of this section. The staff shall include persons with knowledge of and expertise in corporate, municipal, and structured debt finance.

(3) COMMISSION EXAMINATIONS.—

(A) ANNUAL EXAMINATIONS REQUIRED.—The Office shall conduct an examination of each nationally recognized statistical rating organization at least annually.

(B) CONDUCT OF EXAMINATIONS.—Each examination under subparagraph (A) shall include, *as appropriate*, a review of—

(i) whether the nationally recognized statistical rating organization conducts business in accordance with the policies, procedures, and rating methodologies of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization;

(ii) the management of conflicts of interest by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization;

(iii) implementation of ethics policies by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization;

(iv) the internal supervisory controls of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization;

(v) the governance of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization;

(vi) the activities of the individual designated by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization under subsection (j)(1);

(vii) the processing of complaints by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization; and

(viii) the policies of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization governing the post-employment activities of former staff of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(C) INSPECTION REPORTS.—The Commission shall make available to the public, in an easily understandable format, an annual report summarizing—

(i) the essential findings of all examinations conducted under subparagraph (A), as deemed appropriate by the Commission;

(ii) the responses by the nationally recognized statistical rating organizations to any material regulatory deficiencies identified by the Commission under clause (i); and

(iii) whether the nationally recognized statistical rating organizations have appropriately addressed the recommendations of the Commission contained in previous reports under this subparagraph.

(4) RULEMAKING AUTHORITY.—The Commission shall—

(A) establish, by rule, fines, and other penalties applicable to any nationally recognized statistical rating organization that violates the requirements of this section and the rules thereunder; and

(B) issue such rules as may be necessary to carry out this section.

(q) TRANSPARENCY OF RATINGS PERFORMANCE.—

(1) RULEMAKING REQUIRED.—The Commission shall, by rule, require that each nationally recognized statistical rating organization publicly disclose information on the initial credit ratings determined by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization for each type of obligor, security, and money market instrument, and any subsequent changes to such credit ratings, for the purpose of allowing users of credit ratings to evaluate the accuracy of ratings and compare the performance of ratings by different nationally recognized statistical rating organizations.

(2) CONTENT.—The rules of the Commission under this subsection shall require, at a minimum, disclosures that—

(A) are comparable among nationally recognized statistical rating organizations, to allow users of credit ratings to compare the performance of credit ratings across nationally recognized statistical rating organizations;

(B) are clear and informative for investors having a wide range of sophistication who use or might use credit ratings;

(C) include performance information over a range of years and for a variety of types of credit ratings, including for credit ratings withdrawn by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization;

(D) are published and made freely available by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization, on an easily accessible portion of its website, and in writing, when requested;

(E) are appropriate to the business model of a nationally recognized statistical rating organization; and

(F) each nationally recognized statistical rating organization include an attestation with any credit rating it issues affirming that no part of the rating was influenced by any other business activities, that the rating was based solely on the merits of the instruments being rated, and that such rating was an independent evaluation of the risks and merits of the instrument.

(r) CREDIT RATINGS METHODOLOGIES.—The Commission shall prescribe rules, for the protection of investors and in the public interest, with respect to the procedures and methodologies, including qualitative and quantitative data and models, used by nationally recognized statistical rating organizations that require each nationally recognized statistical rating organization—

(1) to ensure that credit ratings are determined using procedures and methodologies, including qualitative and quantitative data and models, that are—

(A) approved by the board of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization, a body performing a function similar to that of a board; and

(B) in accordance with the policies and procedures of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization for the development and modification of credit rating procedures and methodologies;

(2) to ensure that when material changes to credit rating procedures and methodologies (including changes to qualitative and quantitative data and models) are made, that—

(A) the changes are applied consistently to all credit ratings to which the changed procedures and methodologies apply;

(B) to the extent that changes are made to credit rating surveillance procedures and methodologies, the changes are applied to then-current credit ratings by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization within a reasonable time period determined by the Commission, by rule; and

(C) the nationally recognized statistical rating organization publicly discloses the reason for the change; and

(3) to notify users of credit ratings—

(A) of the version of a procedure or methodology, including the qualitative methodology or quantitative inputs, used with respect to a particular credit rating;

(B) when a material change is made to a procedure or methodology, including to a qualitative model or quantitative inputs;

(C) when a significant error is identified in a procedure or methodology, including a qualitative or quantitative model, that may result in credit rating actions; and

(D) of the likelihood of a material change described in subparagraph (B) resulting in a change in current credit ratings.

(s) TRANSPARENCY OF CREDIT RATING METHODOLOGIES AND INFORMATION REVIEWED.—

(1) FORM FOR DISCLOSURES.—The Commission shall require, by rule, each nationally recognized statistical rating organiza-

tion to prescribe a form to accompany the publication of each credit rating that discloses—

(A) information relating to—

(i) the assumptions underlying the credit rating procedures and methodologies;

(ii) the data that was relied on to determine the credit rating; and

(iii) if applicable, how the nationally recognized statistical rating organization used servicer or remittance reports, and with what frequency, to conduct surveillance of the credit rating; and

(B) information that can be used by investors and other users of credit ratings to better understand credit ratings in each class of credit rating issued by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(2) FORMAT.—The form developed under paragraph (1) shall—

(A) be easy to use and helpful for users of credit ratings to understand the information contained in the report;

(B) require the nationally recognized statistical rating organization to provide the content described in paragraph (3)(B) in a manner that is directly comparable across types of securities; and

(C) be made readily available to users of credit ratings, in electronic or paper form, as the Commission may, by rule, determine.

(3) CONTENT OF FORM.—

(A) QUALITATIVE CONTENT.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall disclose on the form developed under paragraph (1)—

(i) the credit ratings produced by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization;

(ii) the main assumptions and principles used in constructing procedures and methodologies, including qualitative methodologies and quantitative inputs and assumptions about the correlation of defaults across underlying assets used in rating structured products;

(iii) the potential limitations of the credit ratings, and the types of risks excluded from the credit ratings that the nationally recognized statistical rating organization does not comment on, including liquidity, market, and other risks;

(iv) information on the uncertainty of the credit rating, including—

(I) information on the reliability, accuracy, and quality of the data relied on in determining the credit rating; and

(II) a statement relating to the extent to which data essential to the determination of the credit rating were reliable or limited, including—

(aa) any limits on the scope of historical data; and

(bb) any limits in accessibility to certain documents or other types of information that would have better informed the credit rating;

(v) whether and to what extent third party due diligence services have been used by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization, a description of the information that such third party reviewed in conducting due diligence services, and a description of the findings or conclusions of such third party;

(vi) a description of the data about any obligor, issuer, security, or money market instrument that were relied upon for the purpose of determining the credit rating;

(vii) a statement containing an overall assessment of the quality of information available and considered in producing a rating for an obligor, security, or money market instrument, in relation to the quality of information available to the nationally recognized statistical rating organization in rating similar issuances;

(viii) information relating to conflicts of interest of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization; and

(ix) such additional information as the Commission may require.

(B) QUANTITATIVE CONTENT.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall disclose on the form developed under this subsection—

(i) an explanation or measure of the potential volatility of the credit rating, including—

(I) any factors that might lead to a change in the credit ratings; and

(II) the magnitude of the change that a user can expect under different market conditions;

(ii) information on the content of the rating, including—

(I) the historical performance of the rating; and

(II) the expected probability of default and the expected loss in the event of default;

(iii) information on the sensitivity of the rating to assumptions made by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization, including—

(I) 5 assumptions made in the ratings process that, without accounting for any other factor, would have the greatest impact on a rating if the assumptions were proven false or inaccurate; and

(II) an analysis, using specific examples, of how each of the 5 assumptions identified under subclause (I) impacts a rating;

(iv) such additional information as may be required by the Commission.

(4) DUE DILIGENCE SERVICES FOR ASSET-BACKED SECURITIES.—

(A) FINDINGS.—The issuer or underwriter of any asset-backed security shall make publicly available the findings and conclusions of any third-party due diligence report obtained by the issuer or underwriter.

(B) CERTIFICATION REQUIRED.—In any case in which third-party due diligence services are employed by a na-

nationally recognized statistical rating organization, an issuer, or an underwriter, the person providing the due diligence services shall provide to any nationally recognized statistical rating organization that produces a rating to which such services relate, written certification, as provided in subparagraph (C).

(C) **FORMAT AND CONTENT.**—The Commission shall establish the appropriate format and content for the written certifications required under subparagraph (B), to ensure that providers of due diligence services have conducted a thorough review of data, documentation, and other relevant information necessary for a nationally recognized statistical rating organization to provide an accurate rating.

(D) **DISCLOSURE OF CERTIFICATION.**—The Commission shall adopt rules requiring a nationally recognized statistical rating organization, at the time at which the nationally recognized statistical rating organization produces a rating, to disclose the certification described in subparagraph (B) to the public in a manner that allows the public to determine the adequacy and level of due diligence services provided by a third party.

(t) **CORPORATE GOVERNANCE, ORGANIZATION, AND MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST.**—

(1) **BOARD OF DIRECTORS.**—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall have a board of directors.

(2) **INDEPENDENT DIRECTORS.**—

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—At least $\frac{1}{2}$ of the board of directors, but not fewer than 2 of the members thereof, shall be independent of the nationally recognized statistical rating agency. A portion of the independent directors shall include users of ratings from a nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(B) **INDEPENDENCE DETERMINATION.**—In order to be considered independent for purposes of this subsection, a member of the board of directors of a nationally recognized statistical rating organization—

(i) may not, other than in his or her capacity as a member of the board of directors or any committee thereof—

(I) accept any consulting, advisory, or other compensatory fee from the nationally recognized statistical rating organization; or

(II) be a person associated with the nationally recognized statistical rating organization or with any affiliated company thereof; and

(ii) shall be disqualified from any deliberation involving a specific rating in which the independent board member has a financial interest in the outcome of the rating.

(C) **COMPENSATION AND TERM.**—The compensation of the independent members of the board of directors of a nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall not be linked to the business performance of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization, and shall be arranged

so as to ensure the independence of their judgment. The term of office of the independent directors shall be for a pre-agreed fixed period, not to exceed 5 years, and shall not be renewable.

(3) DUTIES OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS.—In addition to the overall responsibilities of the board of directors, the board shall oversee—

(A) the establishment, maintenance, and enforcement of policies and procedures for determining credit ratings;

(B) the establishment, maintenance, and enforcement of policies and procedures to address, manage, and disclose any conflicts of interest;

(C) the effectiveness of the internal control system with respect to policies and procedures for determining credit ratings; and

(D) the compensation and promotion policies and practices of the nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(4) TREATMENT OF NRSRO SUBSIDIARIES.—If a nationally recognized statistical rating organization is a subsidiary of a parent entity, the board of the directors of the parent entity may satisfy the requirements of this subsection by assigning to a committee of such board of directors the duties under paragraph (3), if—

(A) at least $\frac{1}{2}$ of the members of the committee (including the chairperson of the committee) are independent, as defined in this section; and

(B) at least 1 member of the committee is a user of ratings from a nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(5) EXCEPTION AUTHORITY.—If the Commission finds that compliance with the provisions of this subsection present an unreasonable burden on a small nationally recognized statistical rating organization, the Commission may permit the nationally recognized statistical rating organization to delegate such responsibilities to a committee that includes at least one individual who is a user of ratings of a nationally recognized statistical rating organization.

(u) DUTY TO REPORT TIPS ALLEGING MATERIAL VIOLATIONS OF LAW.—

(1) DUTY TO REPORT.—Each nationally recognized statistical rating organization shall refer to the appropriate law enforcement or regulatory authorities any information that the nationally recognized statistical rating organization receives from a third party and finds credible that alleges that an issuer of securities rated by the nationally recognized statistical rating organization has committed or is committing a material violation of law that has not been adjudicated by a Federal or State court.

(2) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in paragraph (1) may be construed to require a nationally recognized statistical rating organization to verify the accuracy of the information described in paragraph (1).

(v) INFORMATION FROM SOURCES OTHER THAN THE ISSUER.—In producing a credit rating, a nationally recognized statistical rating

organization shall consider information about an issuer that the nationally recognized statistical rating organization has, or receives from a source other than the issuer or underwriter, that the nationally recognized statistical rating organization finds credible and potentially significant to a rating decision.

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