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Municipalities Continuing Disclosure Cooperation Initiative

Division of Enforcement

U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission

I. Introduction

The Municipalities Continuing Disclosure Cooperation Initiative (the "MCDC Initiative") is intended to address potentially widespread violations of the federal securities laws by municipal issuers and underwriters of municipal securities in connection with certain representations about continuing disclosures in bond offering documents.

As described below, under the MCDC Initiative, the Division of Enforcement (the "Division") of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (the "Commission") will recommend favorable settlement terms to issuers and obligated persons involved in the offer or sale of municipal securities (collectively, "issuers") as well as underwriters of such offerings if they self-report to the Division possible violations involving materially inaccurate statements relating to prior compliance with the continuing disclosure obligations specified in Rule 15c2-12 under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (the "Exchange Act").¹

II. Background

Rule 15c2-12 generally prohibits any underwriter from purchasing or selling municipal securities unless the issuer has committed to providing continuing disclosure regarding the security and issuer, including information about its financial condition and operating data.² Rule 15c2-12 also generally requires that any final official statement prepared in connection with a primary offering of municipal securities contain a description of any instances in the previous five years in which the issuer failed to comply, in all material respects, with any previous commitment to provide such continuing disclosure.

The Commission may file enforcement actions under either Section 17(a) of the Securities Act of 1933 (the "Securities Act"), and/or Section 10(b) of the Exchange Act against issuers for inaccurately stating in final official statements that they have substantially complied with their prior continuing disclosure obligations. In such instances, underwriters for these bond offerings may also have violated the anti-fraud provisions to the extent they failed to exercise adequate due diligence in determining whether issuers have complied with such obligations, and as a result, failed to form a reasonable basis for believing the truthfulness of a key representation in the issuer's official statement. For instance, on July 29, 2013, the Commission charged a school district in Indiana and its underwriter with falsely stating to bond investors that the school district had been properly providing annual financial information and notices required as part of its prior bond offerings.³ Without admitting or denying the Commission's findings, the school district and underwriter each consented to, among other things, an order to cease and desist from committing or causing any violations of Section 10(b) of the Exchange Act and Rule 10b-5. The underwriter also agreed to pay disgorgement and prejudgment interest of \$279,446 as well as a penalty of \$300,000.

The Commission has in the past emphasized that the likelihood that an issuer will abide by its continuing disclosure obligations is critical to any evaluation of its covenants. An underwriter's obligation to have a reasonable basis to believe that the key representations in a final official statement are true and accurate extends to an issuer's representations concerning past compliance with disclosure obligations. Indeed, this provision of Rule 15c2-12 was specifically intended to serve as an incentive for issuers to comply with their undertakings to provide disclosures in the secondary market for municipal securities, and also assists underwriters and others in assessing the reliability of the issuer's disclosure representations. Moreover, the Commission has in the past stated that it believes that it is doubtful that an underwriter could form a reasonable basis for relying on the accuracy or completeness of an issuer's ongoing disclosure representations without the underwriter affirmatively inquiring as to that filing history,

Questionnaire

[Municipalities Continuing Disclosure Cooperation Initiative Questionnaire for Self-Reporting Entities](#)

and the underwriter may not rely solely on a written certification from an issuer that it has provided all filings or notices.⁴

Based on available information, and as highlighted in the [Commission's August 2012 Municipal Market Report](#), there is significant concern that many issuers have not been complying with their obligation to file continuing disclosure documents and that federal securities law violations involving false statements concerning such compliance may be widespread.

III. The MCDC Initiative

A. Who Should Consider Self-Reporting to the Division?

Issuers who may have made materially inaccurate statements in a final official statement regarding their prior compliance with their continuing obligations as described in Rule 15c2-12 should consider self-reporting to the Division to take advantage of the MCDC Initiative.

Underwriters of offerings in which the final official statement contains materially inaccurate statements regarding an issuer's prior compliance with continuing disclosure obligations should also consider self-reporting under the MCDC Initiative. Such underwriters may include the lead underwriter in an underwriting syndicate of such offerings or the sole underwriter in such offerings, and includes both competitive and negotiated underwritings.

Issuers or underwriters that have already been contacted by the Division as of the date of this announcement regarding possible inaccurate statements as to past compliance with continuing disclosure obligations, but against whom no enforcement action has yet been taken, may be eligible for the MCDC Initiative and should contact the Enforcement staff to discuss eligibility.

B. When and What Must Issuers and Underwriters Self Report?

To be eligible for the MCDC Initiative, an issuer or underwriter must self-report by accurately completing the [attached questionnaire](#) and submitting it within the six month period beginning March 10, 2014 and ending at 12:00 a.m. EST on September 10, 2014. Information required by the questionnaire includes:

- identification and contact information of the self-reporting entity;
- information regarding the municipal securities offerings containing the potentially inaccurate statements;
- identities of the lead underwriter, municipal advisor, bond counsel, underwriter's counsel and disclosure counsel, if any, and the primary contact person at each entity, for each such offering;
- any facts that the self-reporting entity would like to provide to assist the staff in understanding the circumstances that may have led to the potentially inaccurate statement(s); and
- a statement that the self-reporting entity intends to consent to the applicable settlement terms under the MCDC Initiative.

Submissions may be made by email to MCDCsubmissions@sec.gov, by fax to (301) 847-4713 or by mail to MCDC Initiative, U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, Boston Regional Office, 33 Arch Street, Boston, MA 02110.

C. Standardized Settlement Terms the Division Will Recommend

To the extent an entity meets the requirements of the MCDC Initiative and the Division decides to recommend enforcement action against the entity ("eligible issuer" or "eligible underwriter"), the Division will recommend that the Commission accept a settlement which includes the terms described below.⁵

1. Types of Proceedings and Nature of Charges

For eligible issuers, the Division will recommend that the Commission accept a settlement pursuant to which the issuer consents to the institution of a cease and desist proceeding under Section 8A of the Securities Act for violation(s) of Section 17(a)(2) of the Securities Act.⁶ The Division will recommend a settlement in which the issuer neither admits nor denies the findings of the Commission.

For eligible underwriters, the Division will recommend that the Commission accept a settlement pursuant to which the underwriter consents to the institution of a cease and

desist proceeding under Section 8A of the Securities Act and administrative proceedings under Section 15(b) of the Exchange Act for violation(s) of Section 17(a)(2) of the Securities Act. The Division will recommend a settlement in which the underwriter neither admits nor denies the findings of the Commission.

2. Undertakings

For eligible issuers, the settlement to be recommended by the Division must include undertakings by the issuers. Specifically, as part of the settlement, the issuer must undertake to:

- establish appropriate policies and procedures and training regarding continuing disclosure obligations within 180 days of the institution of the proceedings;
- comply with existing continuing disclosure undertakings, including updating past delinquent filings within 180 days of the institution of the proceedings;
- cooperate with any subsequent investigation by the Division regarding the false statement(s), including the roles of individuals and/or other parties involved;
- disclose in a clear and conspicuous fashion the settlement terms in any final official statement for an offering by the issuer within five years of the date of institution of the proceedings; and
- provide the Commission staff with a compliance certification regarding the applicable undertakings by the issuer on the one year anniversary of the date of institution of the proceedings.

For eligible underwriters, the settlement to be recommended by the Division must include undertakings by the underwriters. Specifically, as part of the settlement, the underwriter must undertake to:

- retain an independent consultant, not unacceptable to the Commission staff, to conduct a compliance review and, within 180 days of the institution of proceedings, provide recommendations to the underwriter regarding the underwriter's municipal underwriting due diligence process and procedures;
- within 90 days of the independent consultant's recommendations, take reasonable steps to enact such recommendations; provided that the underwriter make seek approval from the Commission staff to not adopt recommendations that the underwriter can demonstrate to be unduly burdensome;
- cooperate with any subsequent investigation by the Division regarding the false statement(s), including the roles of individuals and/or other parties involved; and
- provide the Commission staff with a compliance certifications regarding the applicable undertakings by the Underwriter on the one year anniversary of the date of institution of the proceedings.

3. Civil Penalties

For eligible issuers, the Division will recommend that the Commission accept a settlement in which there is no payment of any civil penalty by the issuer.

For eligible underwriters, the Division will recommend that the Commission accept a settlement in which the underwriter consents to an order requiring payment of a civil penalty as described below:

- For offerings of \$30 million or less, the underwriter will be required to pay a civil penalty of \$20,000 per offering containing a materially false statement;
- For offerings of more than \$30 million, the underwriter will be required to pay a civil penalty of \$60,000 per offering containing a materially false statement;
- However, no underwriter will be required to pay more than \$500,000 total in civil penalties under the MCDC Initiative.

D. No Assurances Offered with Respect to Individual Liability

The MCDC Initiative covers only eligible issuers and underwriters. The Division provides no assurance that individuals associated with those entities, such as municipal officials and employees of underwriting firms, will be offered similar terms if they have engaged in violations of the federal securities laws. The Division may recommend enforcement action against such individuals and may seek remedies beyond those available through the MCDC Initiative. Assessing whether to recommend enforcement action against an individual for violations of the federal securities laws necessarily involves a case-by-case assessment of specific facts and circumstances, including evidence regarding the level of intent and other factors such as cooperation by the individual.

E. No Assurances for Entities That Do Not Take Advantage of MCDC Initiative

For issuers and underwriters that would be eligible for the terms of the MCDC initiative but that do not self-report pursuant to the terms of the MCDC Initiative, the Division offers no assurances that it will recommend the above terms in any subsequent enforcement recommendation. As noted above, assessing whether to recommend enforcement action necessarily involves a case-by-case assessment of specific facts and circumstances, but entities are cautioned that enforcement actions outside of the MCDC initiative could result in the Division or the Commission seeking remedies beyond those described in the initiative. For issuers, the Division will likely recommend and seek financial sanctions. For underwriters, the Division will likely recommend and seek financial sanctions in amounts greater than those available pursuant to the MCDC Initiative.

Questions regarding the MCDC Initiative may be directed to MCDCinquiries@sec.gov.

¹ Recommendations by the Division to the Commission are subject to approval by the Commission.

² The issuers' agreement to make such disclosures is memorialized in a written undertaking frequently called a Continuing Disclosure Agreement. The Continuing Disclosure Agreement requires that issuer to file annual financial information and notices of certain material events with the Electronic Municipal Market Access, or EMMA, an electronic information repository system maintained by the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board (MSRB), which is accessible to all investors on the internet.

³ *In the Matter of West Clark Community Schools*, AP File No. 3-15391 (July 29, 2013); *In the Matter of City Securities Corporation and Randy G. Ruhl*, AP File No. 3-15390 (July 29, 2013).

⁴ See "Municipal Securities Disclosure," Securities Exchange Act Release No. 34961 (November 10, 1994), 59 FR 59590, *supra* notes 50-54 (November 17, 1994). See also "Amendments to Municipal Securities Disclosure," Securities Exchange Act Release No. 34-62184A (May 26, 2010), 75 FR 331100, *supra* n. 348-362 (June 10, 2010).

⁵ The standardized settlement terms of the MCDC Initiative are only applicable to inaccurate statements concerning compliance with continuing disclosure obligations. The MCDC Initiative and the standardized settlement terms are not applicable to other material misstatements in final official statements or related communications or other misconduct. Any other potential misconduct is subject to investigation and separate enforcement action, if appropriate. If enforcement action is taken, entities may be subject to additional remedies for that misconduct, including additional financial sanctions.

⁶ Violations of Section 17(a)(2) require a finding of negligent conduct.

Modified: March 10, 2014

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