

March 29, 2017

Office of Regulations and Interpretations  
Employee Benefits Security Administration  
Attn: Conflict of Interest Rule  
Room N-5655  
U.S. Department of Labor  
200 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20210

To Whom It May Concern:

On April 8, 2016, the Department of Labor ("Department") published its final "Conflict of Interest" rule. The new rule vastly expands the definition of "fiduciary" under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act ("ERISA") requiring both investment advisers and broker-dealers providing advice to accounts subject to ERISA to act in a fiduciary capacity.

At Financial Independence Network, we strongly believe that the rule, as published, will adversely affect the ability of many of our clients to retire. Our client base spans the wealth spectrum from beginner investors to high net worth clients who have been investing for decades. One of our strongest attributes in servicing our clients is our ability to provide access to a wide variety of retirement products and services to any client regardless of their investing experience or their available assets to invest. We believe the new rule infringes upon our ability to service our entire client base, and our ability to provide the products and services that our clients both want and need to achieve their retirement goals.

Financial Independence Network firmly believes that the short implementation period provided by the rule will adversely affect our clients due to several factors:

- I believe this will push clients toward passive investment strategies rather than allowing investors to make their own investment decisions or rely upon the professional judgment of experienced financial advisors
- Unlike our firm, which practices a "holistic" approach which factors in Social Security, Medicare, qualified and non-qualified money, estate planning, and a tax practice with an Enrolled Agent for potential tax consequences, I fear that an investor that is not educated in these areas will potentially make an error that cannot be undone – such as taking qualified money as a lump sum distribution, or choosing a pension program that does not include a survivor benefit, or not correctly complete their beneficiary designations.

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500 Elm Grove Road, Suite 200 • Elm Grove, Wisconsin 53122  
(262) 796-0030 • Fax: (262) 796-1877 • 1-800-252-0030

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The outcome of these adjustments will predominantly impact, and potentially exclude entirely, our clients with a smaller amount of investable assets.

On a broader scale, we believe that many of the requirements of the rule are impractical in application and will cause confusion with the retirement investors today. An unintentional consequence of the rule, and the resulting increase in expenses, will be to force many smaller firms serving retirement investors today to simply close their doors or be acquired. The consolidation of the industry, specifically in the independent channel, will create an environment where clients have a limited choice of advisors, investments, and investment education and advice. Again, this consequence more heavily impacts the smaller investor but also has an overarching impact on all retirement investors.

It is my strong belief that the "Conflict of Interest" rule, as published, needs to be repealed and replaced with a rule that provides a uniform fiduciary standard of care applicable to all professionals providing personalized investment advice to retail clients. We believe the current proposed 60-day delay is an important first step in moving toward the ultimate goal of repealing and replacing the rule.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Leist", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Leist  
President, Financial Independence Network