

### **Proxy Voting Policy**

When Victory Capital Management Inc. (“Victory”) client accounts hold stock and Victory has an obligation to vote proxies for the stock, the voting authority will be exercised in accordance with:

- The direction and guidance, if any, provided by the document establishing the account relationship
- Principles of fiduciary law and Rule 206(4)-6 under the Investment Advisers Act of 1940, as amended. Both require Victory to act in the best interests of the account. In voting such stock, Victory will exercise the care, skill, prudence and diligence a prudent person would use, considering the aims, objectives, and guidance provided by the documents governing the account
- The guidelines listed in this policy, including the ISS Taft Hartley guidelines in Appendix A and the Victory public company guidelines in Appendix B

Victory votes client securities in the best interests of the client. In general, this entails voting client proxies with the objective of increasing the long-term economic value of client assets. In determining the best interests of the account, Victory considers, among other things, the effect of the proposal on the underlying value of the securities (including the effect on marketability of the securities and the effect of the proposal on future prospects of the issuer), the composition and effectiveness of the issuer's board of directors, the issuer's corporate governance practices, and the quality of communications from the issuer to its shareholders.

Where Victory has an obligation to vote client proxies:

- Reasonable efforts will be made to monitor and keep abreast of corporate actions
- All stock, whether by proxy or in person, will be voted, provided there is sufficient time and information available
- A written record of such voting will be maintained by Victory
- Non-routine proposals not covered by the guidelines or involving other special circumstances will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with input from the appropriate Victory analyst(s) or portfolio manager(s).
- Victory's Proxy Committee (the “Proxy Committee”) will supervise the voting of client securities. In all cases, the ultimate voting decision and responsibility rests with the members of the Proxy Committee.
- Voting rights for securities that have been placed on loan by a client or a client's custodian generally pass to the borrower, which interferes with Victory's ability to vote on shareholder matters. In these circumstances Victory generally will be unable to act on specific proxy matters.
- Victory will not necessarily vote all client proxies for a particular company meeting in a uniform manner. Depending on client objectives, as well as the opinions of Victory's various investment teams, Victory will split votes when appropriate in order to help insure that Victory is acting in the best interest of all of its clients.

### **Statement of Corporate Governance**

The voting rights associated with stock ownership are as valuable as any other financial assets. As such, they must be managed in the same manner. Victory has established voting guidelines that seek to protect these rights while attempting to maximize the value of the underlying securities.

**Proxy Voting Procedure**

The Proxy Committee determines how proxies will be voted. Decisions are based exclusively with the best interest of the client in mind.

Voting may be executed through administrative screening per established guidelines with oversight by the Proxy Committee or upon vote by a quorum of the Proxy Committee.

Victory's portfolio managers opinions concerning the management and prospects of the issuer may be taken into account in determining whether a vote for or against a proposal is in the client's best interests. Therefore, Victory will not necessarily vote all client proxys for a particular company meeting in a uniform manner. Insufficient information, onerous requests or vague, ambiguous wording may indicate that a vote against a proposal is appropriate, even when the general principal appears to be reasonable.

The Proxy Committee is comprised of Victory employees who represent vital areas within the company and can provide a range of knowledge which enhances the committee's decision making capabilities. Quorum exists when three voting committee members are either in attendance or participate remotely via video or teleconference. Approval is based on a majority of votes cast.

Victory has engaged ISS (Institutional Shareholder Services) to perform the administrative tasks of receiving proxies, proxy statements, and voting proxies in accordance with the Victory Proxy Policy. In no circumstances shall ISS have the authority to vote proxies except in accordance with standing or specific instructions given to it by Victory. Victory will perform annual testing of actual votes cast versus these policy guidelines to help insure that ballots are being voted per policy. ISS also performs regular proxy ballot reconciliations which compare client holdings to actual ballots received. ISS then provides Victory with periodic reports of any discrepancies identified during the reconciliation process. Victory is responsible for working with ISS and client custodians to resolve any discrepancies and insure that all client proxy ballots are voted.

### **Voting Guidelines**

The following guidelines are intended to assist in voting proxies and are not to be considered rigid rules. The Proxy Committee is directed to apply these guidelines as appropriate. On occasion, however, a contrary vote may be warranted when such action is in the best interests of the account or if it is required under the documents governing the account.

The committee may also take into account independent third party, general industry guidance or other governance board review sources when making decisions. The committee may additionally seek guidance from other internal sources with special expertise on a given topic, where appropriate.

All Proxy Committee voting decisions will be documented.

The following is a discussion of selected proxy proposals which are considered periodically at annual meetings. Victory's general position with regard to such proposals is also included.

### **International Proxy Voting**

Victory will attempt to vote every proxy it receives for all international foreign proxies. However, there may be situations in which Victory may vote against, withhold a vote or cannot vote at all. For example, Victory may not receive a meeting notice in enough time to vote or Victory may not be able to obtain enough information to make a fully informed decision, in which case we will vote against.

In certain foreign jurisdictions, voting of proxies will result in the lockup of shares due to issues such as shareblocking or re-registration, impairing Victory's ability to trade those shares for several days. This could result in significant loss to the investor. Consequently, in those foreign jurisdictions which engage in this practice, Victory will generally refrain from proxy voting. Specifically, for shareblocking and re-registration, Victory will automatically Take No Action through a Do Not Vote instruction for ballots that would immobilize the shares. Victory has the option to override the automation if we become aware of a situation where we wish to vote and are not concerned with the short term inability to trade out of the position. In re-registration

or shareblocking markets, where shares are not immobilized by voting instructions, ballots are voted per policy.

In other foreign jurisdictions, the determination by the Proxy Committee to vote, or refrain from voting proxys will take into consideration any additional costs to investors which may be incurred from the research and voting process. Finally, these guidelines will be applied in foreign markets taking into account local regulatory requirements, local corporate governance codes and local market best practices.

### **Additional Topics**

Any issue not covered within the guidelines will be evaluated by the Proxy Committee on a case-by-case basis.

### **Material Conflicts of Interest**

In the event a material conflict of interest arises between Victory's interests and those of a client during the course of voting client's proxies, the Proxy Committee shall:

- Vote the proxy in accordance with the Proxy Voting Guidelines unless such guidelines are judged by the Proxy Committee to be inapplicable to the proxy matter at issue
- In the event that the Proxy Voting Guidelines are inapplicable, determine whether a vote for, or against, the proxy is in the best interest of the client's account
- Document the nature of the conflict and the rationale for the recommended vote
- Solicit the opinions of Victory's Chief Compliance Officer, and if necessary the Chief Legal Officer, or their designee, or consult an internal or external, independent adviser
- Report to the Victory Capital Management Board any proxy votes that took place with a material conflict situation present, including the nature of the conflict and the basis or rationale for the voting decision made

If a member of the Proxy Committee has a personal conflict (e.g. family member on board of company) he/she will recuse themselves from voting.

### **Recordkeeping**

In accordance with Rule 204-2(c)(2) under the Investment Advisers Act of 1940, as amended, Victory will retain the following records with respect to proxy voting:

- Copies of all policies and procedures required by Rule 206(4)-6
- A written record of votes cast on behalf of clients
- Any documents prepared by Victory or the Proxy Committee germane to the voting decision
- A copy of each written client request for information on how Victory voted proxies on such client's behalf
- A copy of any written response by Victory to any written or verbal client request for information on how Victory voted such client's proxies

## **Routine/Miscellaneous**

### **Adjourn Meeting**

Generally vote AGAINST proposals to provide management with the authority to adjourn an annual or special meeting absent compelling reasons to support the proposal.

Vote FOR proposals that relate specifically to soliciting votes for a merger or transaction if supporting that merger or transaction. Vote AGAINST proposals if the wording is too vague or if the proposal includes "other business."

### **Amend Quorum Requirements**

Vote AGAINST proposals to reduce quorum requirements for shareholder meetings below a majority of the shares outstanding unless there are compelling reasons to support the proposal.

### **Amend Minor Bylaws**

Vote FOR bylaw or charter changes that are of a housekeeping nature (updates or corrections).

### **Change Company Name**

Vote FOR proposals to change the corporate name.

### **Change Date, Time, or Location of Annual Meeting**

Vote FOR management proposals to change the date, time, and/or location of the annual meeting unless the proposed change is unreasonable.

Vote AGAINST shareholder proposals to change the date, time, and/or location of the annual meeting unless the current scheduling or location is unreasonable.

### **Other Business**

Vote AGAINST proposals to approve other business when it appears as voting item.

## **Audit-Related**

### **Auditor Indemnification and Limitation of Liability**

Consider the issue of auditor indemnification and limitation of liability CASE-BY-CASE. Factors to be assessed include, but are not limited to:

- The terms of the auditor agreement, the degree to which these agreements impact shareholders' rights
- Motivation and rationale for establishing the agreements
- Quality of disclosure
- Historical practices in the audit area

WITHHOLD or vote AGAINST members of an audit committee in situations where there is persuasive evidence that the audit committee entered into an inappropriate indemnification agreement with its auditor that limits the ability of the company, or its shareholders, to pursue legitimate legal recourse against the audit firm.

### **Auditor Ratification**

Victory expects a company to have completed its due diligence on the auditors; therefore, selection is approved. However, in cases where auditors have failed to render accurate financial statements, votes are withheld. A favorable position is given to auditors who receive more compensation from their audit engagement than other services with the company.

Vote FOR the ratification of auditors.

However, vote AGAINST in cases where auditors have failed to render accurate financial statements or where non-audit fees exceed audit fees. Non-audit fees are excessive if:

- Non-audit (“other”) fees > audit fees + audit-related fees + tax compliance/preparation fees

Tax compliance and preparation include the preparation of original and amended tax returns, refund claims and tax payment planning. All other services in the tax category, such as tax advice, planning or consulting should be added to “Other” fees. If the breakout of tax fees cannot be determined, add all tax fees to “Other” fees.

In circumstances where “Other” fees include fees related to significant one-time capital structure events: initial public offerings, bankruptcy emergence, and spin-offs; and the company makes public disclosure of the amount and nature of those fees which are an exception to the standard “non-audit fee” category, then such fees may be excluded from the non-audit fees considered in determining the ratio of non-audit to audit/audit-related fees/tax compliance and preparation for purposes of determining whether non-audit fees are excessive.

### **Receiving and/or Approving Financial Reports (This is a non-US issue)**

Vote FOR approval of financial statements and director and auditor reports, unless:

- There are concerns about the accounts presented or audit procedures used
- The company is not responsive to shareholder questions about specific items that should be publicly disclosed

### **Shareholder Proposals Limiting Non-Audit Services**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder proposals asking companies to prohibit or limit their auditors from engaging in non-audit services.

### **Shareholder Proposals on Audit Firm Rotation**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder proposals asking for audit firm rotation, taking into account:

- The tenure of the audit firm
- The length of rotation specified in the proposal
- Any significant audit-related issues at the company
- The number of Audit Committee meetings held each year
- The number of financial experts serving on the committee
- Whether the company has a periodic renewal process where the auditor is evaluated for both audit quality and competitive price

## Board of Directors

### Voting on Director Nominees in Uncontested Elections

Votes on director nominees should be determined CASE-BY-CASE.

Four fundamental principles apply when determining votes on director nominees:

1. **Board Accountability:** Practices that promote accountability include: transparency into a company's governance practices; annual board elections; and providing shareholders the ability to remove problematic directors and to vote on takeover defenses or other charter/bylaw amendments. These practices help reduce the opportunity for management entrenchment.
2. **Board Responsiveness:** Directors should be responsive to shareholders, particularly in regard to shareholder proposals that receive a majority vote and to tender offers where a majority of shares are tendered. Furthermore, shareholders should expect directors to devote sufficient time and resources to oversight of the company.
3. **Director Independence:** Without independence from management, the board may be unwilling or unable to effectively set company strategy and scrutinize performance or executive compensation.
4. **Director Competence:** Companies should seek directors who can add value to the board through specific skills or expertise and who can devote sufficient time and commitment to serve effectively. While directors should not be constrained by arbitrary limits such as age or term limits, directors who are unable to attend board and committee meetings and/or who are overextended (i.e. serving on too many boards) raise concern on the director's ability to effectively serve in shareholders' best interests.

### Board Accountability

VOTE WITHHOLD/AGAINST<sup>1</sup> the entire board of directors (except new nominees<sup>2</sup>, who should be considered CASE-BY-CASE), for the following:

#### ***Problematic Takeover Defenses:***

##### **Classified board structure:**

The board is classified, and a continuing director responsible for a problematic governance issue at the board/committee level that would warrant a withhold/against vote recommendation is not up for election -- any or all appropriate nominees (except new) may be held accountable.

##### **Director Performance Evaluation:**

The board lacks accountability and oversight, coupled with sustained poor performance relative to peers. Sustained poor performance is measured by one-, three- and five-year total shareholder returns in the bottom half of a company's four-digit GICS industry group (Russell 3000 companies only). Take into consideration the company's operational metrics and other factors as warranted.

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<sup>1</sup> In general, companies with a plurality vote standard use "Withhold" as the valid contrary vote option in director elections; companies with a majority vote standard use "Against". However, it will vary by company and the proxy must be checked to determine the valid contrary vote option for the particular company.

<sup>2</sup> A "new nominee" is any current nominee who has not already been elected by shareholders and who joined the board after the problematic action in question transpired. If Victory cannot determine whether the nominee joined the board before or after the problematic action transpired, the nominee will be considered a "new nominee" if he or she joined the board within the 12 months prior to the upcoming shareholder meeting.

Problematic provisions include but are not limited to:

- A classified board structure
- A supermajority vote requirement
- Either a plurality vote standard in uncontested director elections or a majority vote standard with no plurality carve-out for contested elections
- The inability of shareholders to call special meetings
- The inability of shareholders to act by written consent
- A dual-class capital structure
- A non-shareholder-approved poison pill

#### **Poison Pills:**

The company has a poison pill that was not approved by shareholders. However, vote case-by-case on nominees if the board adopts an initial pill with a term of one year or less, depending on the disclosed rationale for the adoption, and other factors as relevant (such as a commitment to put any renewal to a shareholder vote).

The board makes a material adverse modification to an existing pill, including, but not limited to, extension, renewal, or lowering the trigger, without shareholder approval.

#### **Restricting Binding Shareholder Proposals:**

Generally vote against or withhold from the members of the governance committee if:

- The company's governing documents impose undue restrictions on shareholders' ability to amend the bylaws. Such restrictions include but are not limited to: outright prohibition on the submission of binding shareholder proposals or share ownership requirements, subject matter restrictions, or time holding requirements in excess of SEC Rule 14a-8. Vote against or withhold on an ongoing basis.

Submission of management proposals to approve or ratify requirements in excess of SEC Rule 14a-8 for the submission of binding bylaw amendments will generally be viewed as an insufficient restoration of shareholders' rights. Generally continue to vote against or withhold on an ongoing basis until shareholders are provided with an unfettered ability to amend the bylaws or a proposal providing for such unfettered right is submitted for shareholder approval.

#### ***Problematic Audit-Related Practices***

Generally, vote AGAINST or WITHHOLD from the members of the Audit Committee if:

- The non-audit fees paid to the auditor are excessive (see discussion under "Auditor Ratification")
- The company receives an adverse opinion on the company's financial statements from its auditor
- There is persuasive evidence that the audit committee entered into an inappropriate indemnification agreement with its auditor that limits the ability of the company, or its shareholders, to pursue legitimate legal recourse against the audit firm

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on members of the Audit Committee and/or the full board if poor accounting practices are identified that rise to a level of serious concern, such as: fraud; misapplication of GAAP; and material weaknesses identified in Section 404 disclosures. Examine the severity, breadth, chronological sequence and duration, as well as the company's efforts at remediation or corrective actions, in determining whether WITHHOLD/AGAINST votes are warranted.

#### ***Problematic Compensation Practices***



In the absence of an Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation (Say on Pay) ballot item or in egregious situations, vote against or withhold from the members of the Compensation Committee and potentially the full board if:

- There is a significant misalignment between CEO pay and company performance
- The company maintains significant problematic pay practices
- The board exhibits a significant level of poor communication and responsiveness to shareholders
- The company fails to include a Say on Pay ballot item when required under SEC provisions, or under the company's declared frequency of say on pay or
- The company fails to include a Frequency of Say on Pay ballot item when required under SEC provisions

Generally vote against members of the board committee responsible for approving/setting non-employee director compensation if there is a pattern (i.e. two or more years) of awarding excessive non-employee director compensation without disclosing a compelling rationale or other mitigating factors.

### ***Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments***

Generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees, who should be considered case-by-case) if the board amends the company's bylaws or charter without shareholder approval in a manner that materially diminishes shareholders' rights or that could adversely impact shareholders, considering the following factors:

- The board's rationale for adopting the bylaw/charter amendment without shareholder ratification
- Disclosure by the company of any significant engagement with shareholders regarding the amendment
- The level of impairment of shareholders' rights caused by the board's unilateral amendment to the bylaws/charter
- The board's track record with regard to unilateral board action on bylaw/charter amendments or other entrenchment provisions
- The company's ownership structure
- The company's existing governance provisions
- The timing of the board's amendment to the bylaws/charter in connection with a significant business development and,
- Other factors, as deemed appropriate, that may be relevant to determine the impact of the amendment on shareholders

For newly public companies, generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees, who should be considered case-by-case) if, prior to or in connection with the company's public offering, the company or its board adopted the following bylaw or charter provisions that are considered to be materially adverse to shareholder rights:

- Supermajority vote requirements to amend the bylaws or charter;
- A classified board structure; or
- Other egregious provisions.

A reasonable sunset provision will be considered a mitigating factor.

Unless the adverse provision is reversed or removed, vote case-by-case on director nominees in subsequent years.

For newly public companies, generally vote against or withhold from the entire board (except new nominees, who should be considered case-by-case) if, prior to or in connection with the company's public offering, the company or its board implemented a multi-class capital structure in which the classes have unequal voting rights without subjecting the multi-class capital structure to a reasonable time-based sunset. In assessing the reasonableness of a time-based sunset provision, consideration will be given to the company's lifespan, its post-IPO ownership structure and the board's disclosed rationale for the sunset period selected. No sunset period of more than seven years from the date of the IPO will be considered to be reasonable. Continue to vote against or withhold from incumbent directors in subsequent years, unless the problematic capital structure is reversed or removed.

### **Governance Failures**

Under extraordinary circumstances, vote AGAINST or WITHHOLD from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board, due to:

- Material failures of governance, stewardship, or fiduciary responsibilities at the company
- Failure to replace management as appropriate or
- Egregious actions related to the director(s)' service on other boards that raise substantial doubt about his or her ability to effectively oversee management and serve the best interests of shareholders at any company

### **Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions**

Vote against/withhold from individual directors, members of the governance committee, or the full board, where boards ask shareholders to ratify existing charter or bylaw provisions considering the following factors:

- The presence of a shareholder proposal addressing the same issue on the same ballot;
- The board's rationale for seeking ratification;
- Disclosure of actions to be taken by the board should the ratification proposal fail;
- Disclosure of shareholder engagement regarding the board's ratification request;
- The level of impairment to shareholders' rights caused by the existing provision;
- The history of management and shareholder proposals on the provision at the company's past meetings;
- Whether the current provision was adopted in response to the shareholder proposal;
- The company's ownership structure; and
- Previous use of ratification proposals to exclude shareholder proposals.

Generally vote against management proposals to ratify provisions of the company's existing charter or bylaws, unless these governance provisions align with best practice. In addition, voting against/withhold from individual directors, members of the governance committee, or the full board may be warranted, considering:

- The presence of a shareholder proposal addressing the same issue on the same ballot;
- The board's rationale for seeking ratification;
- Disclosure of actions to be taken by the board should the ratification proposal fail;
- Disclosure of shareholder engagement regarding the board's ratification request;
- The level of impairment to shareholders' rights caused by the existing provision;
- The history of management and shareholder proposals on the provision at the company's past meetings;
- Whether the current provision was adopted in response to the shareholder proposal;
- The company's ownership structure; and
- Previous use of ratification proposals to exclude shareholder proposals.

## Board Responsiveness

Vote case-by-case on individual directors, committee members, or the entire board of directors as appropriate if:

The board failed to act on a shareholder proposal that received the support of a majority of the shares cast in the previous year or failed to act on a management proposal seeking to ratify an existing charter/bylaw provision that received opposition of a majority of the shares cast in the previous year. Factors that will be considered are:

- Disclosed outreach efforts by the board to shareholders in the wake of the vote
- Rationale provided in the proxy statement for the level of implementation
- The subject matter of the proposal
- The level of support for and opposition to the resolution in past meetings
- Actions taken by the board in response to the majority vote and its engagement with shareholders
- The continuation of the underlying issue as a voting item on the ballot (as either shareholder or management proposals) and
- Other factors as appropriate

The board failed to act on takeover offers where the majority of shares are tendered

At the previous board election, any director received more than 50 percent withhold/against votes of the shares cast and the company has failed to address the issue(s) that caused the high withhold/against vote

The board implements an advisory vote on executive compensation on a less frequent basis than the frequency that received the majority of votes cast at the most recent shareholder meeting at which shareholders voted on the say-on-pay frequency or

The board implements an advisory vote on executive compensation on a less frequent basis than the frequency that received a plurality, but not a majority, of the votes cast at the most recent shareholder meeting at which shareholders voted on the say-on-pay frequency, taking into account

- The board's rationale for selecting a frequency that is different from the frequency that received a plurality
- The company's ownership structure and vote results
- Analysis of whether there are compensation concerns or a history of problematic compensation practices and
- The previous year's support level on the company's say-on-pay proposal

## Director Independence

Vote WITHHOLD/AGAINST Inside Directors and Affiliated Outside Directors (per the current Categorization of Directors) when:

- The inside or affiliated outside director serves on any of the three key committees: audit, compensation, or nominating
- The company lacks an audit, compensation, or nominating committee so that the full board functions as that committee
- The company lacks a formal nominating committee, even if the board attests that the independent directors fulfill the functions of such a committee
- The full board is less than majority independent

## Director Competence

### Attendance at Board and Committee Meetings

Generally vote AGAINST or WITHHOLD from directors (except new nominees<sup>3</sup>) who attend less than 75 percent of the aggregate of their board and committee meetings for the period for which they served, unless an acceptable reason for absences is disclosed in the proxy or another SEC filing. Acceptable reasons for director absences are generally limited to the following:

- Medical issues/illness
- Family emergencies
- Missing only one meeting (when the total of all meetings is three or fewer)

In cases of chronic poor attendance without reasonable justification, in addition to voting against the director(s) with poor attendance, generally vote against or withhold from appropriate members of the nominating/governance committees or the full board.

If the proxy disclosure is unclear and insufficient to determine whether a director attended at least 75 percent of the aggregate of his/her board and committee meetings during his/her period of service, vote AGAINST or WITHHOLD from the director(s) in question.

### Overboarded Directors

Vote AGAINST or WITHHOLD from individual directors who:

- Sit on more than five public company boards
- Are CEOs of public companies who sit on the boards of more than two public companies besides their own-- withhold only at their outside boards

### Other Board-Related Proposals

#### Age/Term Limits

Vote AGAINST management and shareholder proposals to limit the tenure of outside directors through mandatory retirement ages.

Vote AGAINST management proposals to limit the tenure of outside directors through term limits. However, scrutinize boards where the average tenure of all directors exceeds 15 years for independence from management and for sufficient turnover to ensure that new perspectives are being added to the board.

#### Board Size

Vote FOR proposals seeking to fix the board size or designate a range for the board size.

Vote AGAINST proposals that give management the ability to alter the size of the board outside of a specified range without shareholder approval.

#### Classification/Declassification of the Board

Vote AGAINST proposals to classify (stagger) the board.

Vote FOR proposals to repeal classified boards and to elect all directors annually.

#### CEO Succession Planning

Generally vote FOR proposals seeking disclosure on a CEO succession planning policy, considering at a minimum, the following factors:

- The reasonableness/scope of the request; and
- The company's existing disclosure on its current CEO succession planning process.

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<sup>3</sup> New nominees who served for only part of the fiscal year are generally exempted from the attendance policy.

**Cumulative Voting**

Generally vote FOR proposals to eliminate cumulative voting.

Generally vote AGAINST shareholder proposals to restore or provide for cumulative voting.

**Director and Officer Indemnification and Liability Protection**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals on director and officer indemnification and liability protection using Delaware law as the standard.

Vote AGAINST proposals that would:

- Eliminate entirely directors' and officers' liability for monetary damages for violating the duty of care
- Expand coverage beyond just legal expenses to liability for acts, such as negligence, that are more serious violations of fiduciary obligation than mere carelessness
- Expand the scope of indemnification to provide for mandatory indemnification of company officials in connection with acts that previously the company was permitted to provide indemnification for, at the discretion of the company's board (i.e., "permissive indemnification"), but that previously the company was not required to indemnify

Vote FOR only those proposals providing such expanded coverage in cases when a director's or officer's legal defense was unsuccessful if both of the following apply:

- If the director was found to have acted in good faith and in a manner that he reasonably believed was in the best interests of the company
- If only the director's legal expenses would be covered

**Establish/Amend Nominee Qualifications**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals that establish or amend director qualifications. Votes should be based on the reasonableness of the criteria and to what degree they may preclude dissident nominees from joining the board.

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder resolutions seeking a director nominee candidate who possesses a particular subject matter expertise, considering:

- The company's board committee structure, existing subject matter expertise, and board nomination provisions relative to that of its peers
- The company's existing board and management oversight mechanisms regarding the issue for which board oversight is sought
- The company disclosure and performance relating to the issue for which board oversight is sought and any significant related controversies
- The scope and structure of the proposal

**Establish other Board Committee Proposals**

Generally vote AGAINST shareholder proposals to establish a new board committee.

**Filling Vacancies/Removal of Directors**

Vote AGAINST proposals that provide that directors may be removed only for cause.

Vote FOR proposals to restore shareholders' ability to remove directors with or without cause.

Vote AGAINST proposals that provide that only continuing directors may elect replacements to fill board vacancies.

Vote FOR proposals that permit shareholders to elect directors to fill board vacancies.

### **Independent Chair (Separate Chair/CEO)**

Generally vote for shareholder proposals requiring that the board chair position be filled by an independent director, taking into consideration the following:

- The scope and rationale of the proposal;
- The company's current board leadership structure;
- The company's governance structure and practices;
- Company performance; and
- Any other relevant factors that may be applicable.

The following factors will increase the likelihood of a “for” recommendation:

- A majority non-independent board and/or the presence of non-independent directors on key board committees;
- A weak or poorly-defined lead independent director role that fails to serve as an appropriate counterbalance to a combined CEO/chair role;
- The presence of an executive or non-independent chair in addition to the CEO, a recent recombination of the role of CEO and chair, and/or departure from a structure with an independent chair;
- Evidence that the board has failed to oversee and address material risks facing the company;
- A material governance failure, particularly if the board has failed to adequately respond to shareholder concerns or if the board has materially diminished shareholder rights; or evidence that the board has failed to intervene when management's interests are contrary to shareholders' interests.
- Evidence that the board has failed to intervene when management's interests are contrary to shareholders' interests.

### **Majority of Independent Directors/Establishment of Independent Committees**

Vote FOR shareholder proposals asking that a majority or more of directors be independent unless the board composition already meets the proposed threshold by Victory's definition of independent outsider.

Vote FOR shareholder proposals asking that board audit, compensation, and/or nominating committees be composed exclusively of independent directors if they currently do not meet that standard.

### **Majority Vote Standard for the Election of Directors**

Vote AGAINST if the company already has a Resignation Policy in place, otherwise vote with stated policy

Generally vote FOR management proposals to adopt a majority of votes cast standard for directors in uncontested elections. Vote AGAINST if no carve-out for plurality in contested elections is included.

Generally vote FOR precatory and binding shareholder resolutions requesting that the board change the company's bylaws to stipulate that directors need to be elected with an affirmative majority of votes cast, provided it does not conflict with the state law where the company is incorporated. Binding resolutions need to allow for a carve-out for a plurality vote standard when there are more nominees than board seats.

Companies are strongly encouraged to also adopt a post-election policy (also known as a director resignation policy) that will provide guidelines so that the company will promptly address the situation of a holdover director.

### **Proxy Access (Open Access)**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder proposals asking for open or proxy access, taking into account:

- The ownership threshold proposed in the resolution;

- The proponent's rationale for the proposal at the targeted company in terms of board and director conduct.

In the case of candidates nominated pursuant to proxy access, vote case-by-case considering any applicable factors listed below, with reference to contested director elections, or additional factors which may be relevant, including those that are specific to the company, to the nominee(s) and/or to the nature of the election (such as whether or not there are more candidates than board seats).

- Long-term financial performance of the target company relative to its industry
- Management's track record
- Background to the contested election
- Nominee qualifications and any compensatory arrangements
- Strategic plan of dissident slate and quality of critique against management
- Likelihood that the proposed goals and objectives can be achieved (both slates)
- Stock ownership positions

### **Require More Nominees than Open Seats**

Vote AGAINST shareholder proposals that would require a company to nominate more candidates than the number of open board seats.

### **Shareholder Engagement Policy (Shareholder Advisory Committee)**

Generally vote FOR shareholders proposals requesting that the board establish an internal mechanism/process, which may include a committee, in order to improve communications between directors and shareholders, unless the company has the following features, as appropriate:

- Established a communication structure that goes beyond the exchange requirements to facilitate the exchange of information between shareholders and members of the board
- Effectively disclosed information with respect to this structure to its shareholders
- Company has not ignored majority-supported shareholder proposals or a majority withhold vote on a director nominee
- The company has an independent chairman or a lead director, according to Victory's definition. This individual must be made available for periodic consultation and direct communication with major shareholders

### **Proxy Contests- Voting for Director Nominees in Contested Elections**

Internally reviewed on a CASE-BY-CASE basis.

### **Vote No Campaigns**

In cases where companies are targeted in connection with public "vote no" campaigns, evaluate director nominees under the existing governance policies for voting on director nominees in uncontested elections. Take into consideration the arguments submitted by shareholders and other publicly available information.

**Takeover Defenses and Related Actions**

Anti-takeover statutes generally increase management's potential for insulating itself and warding off hostile takeovers that may be beneficial to shareholders. While it may be true that some boards use such devices to obtain higher bids and to enhance shareholder value, it is more likely that such provisions are used to entrench management.

**Advance Notice Requirements for Shareholder Proposals/Nominations**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on advance notice proposals, giving support to those proposals which allow shareholders to submit proposals/nominations as close to the meeting date as reasonably possible and within the broadest window possible, recognizing the need to allow sufficient notice for company, regulatory and shareholder review.

To be reasonable, the company's deadline for shareholder notice of a proposal/ nominations must not be more than 60 days prior to the meeting, with a submittal window of at least 30 days prior to the deadline. The submittal window is the period under which a shareholder must file his proposal/nominations prior to the deadline.

In general, support additional efforts by companies to ensure full disclosure in regard to a proponent's economic and voting position in the company so long as the informational requirements are reasonable and aimed at providing shareholders with the necessary information to review such proposals.

**Amend Bylaws without Shareholder Consent**

Vote AGAINST proposals giving the board exclusive authority to amend the bylaws.

Vote FOR proposals giving the board the ability to amend the bylaws in addition to shareholders.

**Confidential Vote Tabulation/Confidential Voting**

Victory Capital will evaluate shareholder proposals requesting confidential running vote tally proposals on a case-by-case basis taking into account the following factors:

Whether the policy allows the company to monitor the number of votes cast for purposes of achieving a quorum or to conduct solicitations for other proper purposes

Whether the enhanced confidential voting requirement applies to contested elections of directors or to contested proxy solicitations, which would put the company at a disadvantage relative to dissidents

Generally, vote FOR shareholder proposals requesting that corporations adopt confidential voting, use independent vote tabulators, and use independent inspectors of election, as long as the proposal includes a provision for proxy contests as follows: In the case of a contested election, management should be permitted to request that the dissident group honor its confidential voting policy. If the dissidents agree, the policy remains in place. If the dissidents will not agree, the confidential voting policy is waived.

Vote FOR management proposals to adopt confidential voting.

**Control Share Acquisition Provisions**

Control share acquisition statutes function by denying shares their voting rights when they contribute to ownership in excess of certain thresholds. Voting rights for those shares exceeding ownership limits may only be restored by approval of either a majority or supermajority of disinterested shares. Thus, control share acquisition statutes effectively require a hostile bidder to put its offer to a shareholder vote or risk voting disenfranchisement if the bidder continues buying up a large block of shares.



Vote FOR proposals to opt out of control share acquisition statutes unless doing so would enable the completion of a takeover that would be detrimental to shareholders.

Vote AGAINST proposals to amend the charter to include control share acquisition provisions.

Vote FOR proposals to restore voting rights to the control shares.

### **Control Share Cash-Out Provisions**

Control share cash-out statutes give dissident shareholders the right to "cash-out" of their position in a company at the expense of the shareholder who has taken a control position. In other words, when an investor crosses a preset threshold level, remaining shareholders are given the right to sell their shares to the acquirer, who must buy them at the highest acquiring price.

Vote FOR proposals to opt out of control share cash-out statutes.

### **Disgorgement Provisions**

Disgorgement provisions require an acquirer or potential acquirer of more than a certain percentage of a company's stock to disgorge, or pay back, to the company any profits realized from the sale of that company's stock purchased 24 months before achieving control status. All sales of company stock by the acquirer occurring within a certain period of time (between 18 months and 24 months) prior to the investor's gaining control status are subject to these recapture-of-profits provisions.

Vote FOR proposals to opt out of state disgorgement provisions.

### **Equal Access Proposals**

Vote FOR proposals seeking equal access to proxies.

### **Fair Price Provisions**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals to adopt fair price provisions (provisions that stipulate that an acquirer must pay the same price to acquire all shares as it paid to acquire the control shares), evaluating factors such as the vote required to approve the proposed acquisition, the vote required to repeal the fair price provision, and the mechanism for determining the fair price.

Generally, vote AGAINST fair price provisions with shareholder vote requirements greater than a majority of disinterested shares.

### **Freeze-Out Provisions**

Vote FOR proposals to opt out of state freeze-out provisions. Freeze-out provisions force an investor who surpasses a certain ownership threshold in a company to wait a specified period of time before gaining control of the company.

### **Greenmail**

Greenmail payments are targeted share repurchases by management of company stock from individuals or groups seeking control of the company. Since only the hostile party receives payment, usually at a substantial premium over the market value of its shares, the practice discriminates against all other shareholders.

Vote FOR proposals to adopt anti-greenmail charter or bylaw amendments or otherwise restrict a company's ability to make greenmail payments.

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on anti-greenmail proposals when they are bundled with other charter or bylaw amendments.

### **Litigation Rights (including Exclusive Venue and Fee-Shifting Bylaw Provisions)**

Bylaw provisions impacting shareholders' ability to bring suit against the company may include exclusive venue provisions, which provide that the state of incorporation shall be the sole venue for certain types of litigation, and fee-shifting provisions that require a shareholder who sues a company unsuccessfully to pay all litigation expenses of the defendant corporation.

**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on bylaws which impact shareholders' litigation rights, taking into account factors such as:

- The company's stated rationale for adopting such a provision
- Disclosure of past harm from shareholder lawsuits in which plaintiffs were unsuccessful or shareholder lawsuits outside the jurisdiction of incorporation
- The breadth of application of the bylaw, including the types of lawsuits to which it would apply and the definition of key terms
- Governance features such as shareholders' ability to repeal the provision at a later date (including the vote standard applied when shareholders attempt to amend the bylaws) and their ability to hold directors accountable through annual director elections and a majority vote standard in uncontested elections

Generally vote against bylaws that mandate fee-shifting whenever plaintiffs are not completely successful on the merits (i.e., in cases where the plaintiffs are partially successful).

### **Net Operating Loss (NOL) Protective Amendments**

Vote AGAINST proposals to adopt a protective amendment for the stated purpose of protecting a company's net operating losses ("NOLs") if the effective term of the protective amendment would exceed the shorter of three years and the exhaustion of the NOL.

Vote CASE-BY-CASE, considering the following factors, for management proposals to adopt an NOL protective amendment that would remain in effect for the shorter of three years (or less) and the exhaustion of the NOL:

- The ownership threshold (NOL protective amendments generally prohibit stock ownership transfers that would result in a new 5-percent holder or increase the stock ownership percentage of an existing 5-percent holder)
- The value of the NOLs
- Shareholder protection mechanisms (sunset provision or commitment to cause expiration of the protective amendment upon exhaustion or expiration of the NOL)
- The company's existing governance structure including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, track record of responsiveness to shareholders, and any other problematic governance concerns
- Any other factors that may be applicable

### **Poison Pills (Shareholder Rights Plans)**

#### **Shareholder Proposals to Put Pill to a Vote and/or Adopt a Pill Policy**

Vote FOR shareholder proposals requesting that the company submit its poison pill to a shareholder vote or redeem it UNLESS the company has: (1) A shareholder approved poison pill in place; or (2) The

company has adopted a policy concerning the adoption of a pill in the future specifying that the board will only adopt a shareholder rights plan if either:

- Shareholders have approved the adoption of the plan, or
- The board, in its exercise of its fiduciary responsibilities, determines that it is in the best interest of shareholders under the circumstances to adopt a pill without the delay in adoption that would result from seeking stockholder approval (i.e., the “fiduciary out” provision). A poison pill adopted under this fiduciary out will be put to a shareholder ratification vote within 12 months of adoption or expire. If the pill is not approved by a majority of the votes cast on this issue, the plan will immediately terminate.

If the shareholder proposal calls for a time period of less than 12 months for shareholder ratification after adoption, vote FOR the proposal, but add the caveat that a vote within 12 months would be considered sufficient implementation.

### **Management Proposals to Ratify a Poison Pill**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on management proposals on poison pill ratification, focusing on the features of the shareholder rights plan. Rights plans should contain the following attributes:

- No lower than a 20% trigger, flip-in or flip-over
- A term of no more than three years
- No dead-hand, slow-hand, no-hand or similar feature that limits the ability of a future board to redeem the pill
- Shareholder redemption feature (qualifying offer clause); if the board refuses to redeem the pill 90 days after a qualifying offer is announced, 10 percent of the shares may call a special meeting or seek a written consent to vote on rescinding the pill

In addition, the rationale for adopting the pill should be thoroughly explained by the company. In examining the request for the pill, take into consideration the company’s existing governance structure, including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, and any problematic governance concerns.

### **Management Proposals to Ratify a Pill to Preserve Net Operating Losses (NOLs)**

Vote AGAINST proposals to adopt a poison pill for the stated purpose of protecting a company’s net operating losses (“NOLs”) if the term of the pill would exceed the shorter of three years and the exhaustion of the NOL.

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on management proposals for poison pill ratification, considering the following factors, if the term of the pill would be the shorter of three years (or less) and the exhaustion of the NOL:

- The ownership threshold to transfer (NOL pills generally have a trigger slightly below 5 percent)
- The value of the NOLs
- Shareholder protection mechanisms (sunset provision, or commitment to cause expiration of the pill upon exhaustion or expiration of NOLs)
- The company’s existing governance structure including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, track record of responsiveness to shareholders, and any other problematic governance concerns
- Any other factors that may be applicable

### **Reimbursing Proxy Solicitation Expenses**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals to reimburse proxy solicitation expenses. When voting in conjunction with support of a dissident slate, vote FOR the reimbursement of all appropriate proxy solicitation expenses associated with the election.

Generally vote FOR shareholder proposals calling for the reimbursement of reasonable costs incurred in connection with nominating one or more candidates in a contested election where the following apply:

- The election of fewer than 50% of the directors to be elected is contested in the election
- One or more of the dissident's candidates is elected
- Shareholders are not permitted to cumulate their votes for directors
- The election occurred, and the expenses were incurred, after the adoption of this bylaw.

### **Reincorporation Proposals**

Management or shareholder proposals to change a company's state of incorporation should be evaluated CASE-BY-CASE, giving consideration to both financial and corporate governance concerns including the following:

- Reasons for reincorporation
- Comparison of company's governance practices and provisions prior to and following the reincorporation
- Comparison of corporation laws of original state and destination state

Vote FOR reincorporation when the economic factors outweigh any neutral or negative governance changes.

### **Shareholder Ability to Act by Written Consent**

Generally vote AGAINST management and shareholder proposals to restrict or prohibit shareholders' ability to act by written consent.

Generally vote FOR management and shareholder proposals that provide shareholders with the ability to act by written consent, taking into account the following factors:

- Shareholders' current right to act by written consent
- The consent threshold
- The inclusion of exclusionary or prohibitive language
- Investor ownership structure
- Shareholder support of, and management's response to, previous shareholder proposals

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder proposals if, in addition to the considerations above, the company has the following governance and antitakeover provisions:

- An unfettered<sup>4</sup> right for shareholders to call special meetings at a 10 percent threshold
- A majority vote standard in uncontested director elections
- No non-shareholder-approved pill
- An annually elected board

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<sup>4</sup> "Unfettered" means no restrictions on agenda items, no restrictions on the number of shareholders who can group together to reach the 10 percent threshold, and only reasonable limits on when a meeting can be called: no greater than 30 days after the last annual meeting and no greater than 90 prior to the next annual meeting.

**Shareholder Ability to Call Special Meetings**

Vote AGAINST proposals restricting or eliminating shareholders' right to call special meetings.

Vote FOR proposals allowing shareholders to call special meetings unless the company currently provides the right to call special meetings at a threshold of 25 percent, upon which Victory votes AGAINST.

**Stakeholder Provisions**

Vote AGAINST proposals that ask the board to consider non-shareholder constituencies or other non-financial effects when evaluating a merger or business combination.

**State Antitakeover Statutes**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals to opt in or out of state takeover statutes (including fair price provisions, stakeholder laws, poison pill endorsements, severance pay and labor contract provisions, and anti-greenmail provisions).

**Supermajority Vote Requirements**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals that request either the elimination/adoption of supermajority vote requirements or a decrease/increase in the supermajority threshold.

Generally, vote AGAINST proposals to require a supermajority shareholder vote.

Generally, vote FOR management or shareholder proposals to reduce supermajority vote requirements. However, for companies with shareholder(s) who have significant ownership levels, the proposal shall be further examined, taking into account:

- Ownership structure
- Quorum requirements
- Vote requirements

## **CAPITAL/RESTRUCTURING**

The stewardship of a corporation's capital structure involves a number of important issues, including dividend policy, taxes, types of assets, opportunities for growth, ability to finance new projects internally, and the cost of obtaining additional capital. For the most part, these decisions are best left to the board and senior management of the firm. However, while a company's value depends more on its capital investment and operations than on how it is financed, many financing decisions have a significant impact on shareholders, particularly when they involve the issuance of additional common stock, preferred stock, or the assumption of additional debt. Additional equity financing, for example, may reduce an existing shareholder's ownership interest and can dilute the value of his investment. Shareholders must also be alert to potential anti-takeover mechanisms, which are often embedded in management's chosen financing vehicles.

### **Capital**

#### **Adjustments to Par Value of Common Stock**

Vote FOR management proposals to reduce the par value of common stock unless the action is being taken to facilitate an anti-takeover device or some other negative corporate governance action

Vote FOR management proposals to eliminate par value.

#### **Common Stock Authorization**

Vote FOR proposals to increase the number of authorized common shares where the primary purpose of the increase is to issue shares in connection with a transaction on the same ballot that warrants support.

Vote AGAINST proposals at companies with more than one class of common stock to increase the number of authorized shares of the class of common stock that has superior voting rights.

Vote AGAINST proposals to increase the number of authorized common shares if a vote for a reverse stock split on the same ballot is warranted despite the fact that the authorized shares would not be reduced proportionally.

Vote FOR increases in authorized common stock, unless the increase is being used to thwart a takeover, upon which Victory votes AGAINST.

Vote AGAINST proposals that seek to permanently revoke or remove preemptive rights from shareholders.

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on all other proposals to increase the number of shares of common stock authorized for issuance. Take into account company-specific factors that include, at a minimum, the following:

- Past Board Performance:
  - The company's use of authorized shares during the last three years
- The Current Request:
  - Disclosure in the proxy statement of the specific purposes of the proposed increase
  - Disclosure in the proxy statement of specific and severe risks to shareholders of not approving the request
  - The dilutive impact of the request as determined by an allowable increase calculated by Victory (typically 100 percent of existing authorized shares) that reflects the company's need for shares and total shareholder returns

**Issue Stock for Use with Rights Plan**

Vote AGAINST proposals that increase authorized common stock for the explicit purpose of implementing a non-shareholder-approved shareholder rights plan (poison pill).

**Authority to Issue Additional Debt (This is a non-US issue)**

Vote non-convertible debt issuance requests on a CASE-BY-CASE basis, with or without preemptive rights.

Vote FOR the creation/issuance of convertible debt instruments as long as the maximum number of common shares that could be issued upon conversion is reasonable.

Vote FOR proposals to restructure existing debt arrangements unless the terms of the restructuring would adversely affect the rights of shareholders.

**Preemptive Rights**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder proposals that seek preemptive rights, taking into consideration:

- The size of the company
- The shareholder base
- The liquidity of the stock

**Preferred Stock Authorization**

Vote FOR proposals to increase the number of authorized preferred shares where the primary purpose of the increase is to issue shares in connection with a transaction on the same ballot that warrants support.

Vote AGAINST proposals at companies with more than one class or series of preferred stock to increase the number of authorized shares of the class or series of preferred stock that has superior voting rights.

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on all other proposals to increase the number of shares of preferred stock authorized for issuance. Take into account company-specific factors that include, at a minimum, the following:

- Past Board Performance:
  - The company's use of authorized preferred shares during the last three years
- The Current Request:
  - Disclosure in the proxy statement of the specific purposes for the proposed increase
  - Disclosure in the proxy statement of specific and severe risks to shareholders of not approving the request
  - In cases where the company has existing authorized preferred stock, the dilutive impact of the request as determined by an allowable increase calculated by Victory (typically 100 percent of existing authorized shares) that reflects the company's need for shares and total shareholder returns
  - Whether the shares requested are blank check preferred shares that can be used for antitakeover purposes

**Recapitalization Plans**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on recapitalizations (reclassifications of securities), taking into account the following:

- More simplified capital structure
- Enhanced liquidity
- Fairness of conversion terms
- Impact on voting power and dividends

- Reasons for the reclassification
- Conflicts of interest
- Other alternatives considered

### **Reverse Stock Splits**

Vote FOR management proposals to implement a reverse stock split when the number of authorized shares will be proportionately reduced or the effective increase in authorized shares is equal to or less than the allowable increase calculated in accordance common stock authorization guidelines

Vote AGAINST proposals when there is not a proportionate reduction of authorized shares, unless:

- A stock exchange has provided notice to the company of a potential delisting
- The effective increase in authorized shares is equal to or less than the allowable increase calculated in accordance with Victory's Common Stock Authorization policy

### **Share Repurchase Programs**

For U.S.-incorporated companies, and foreign-incorporated U.S. Domestic Issuers that are traded solely on U.S. exchanges, vote for management proposals to institute open-market share repurchase plans in which all shareholders may participate on equal terms, or to grant the board authority to conduct open-market repurchases, in the absence of company-specific concerns regarding:

- Greenmail,
- The use of buybacks to inappropriately manipulate incentive compensation metrics,
- Threats to the company's long-term viability, or
- Other company-specific factors as warranted.

Vote case-by-case on proposals to repurchase shares directly from specified shareholders, balancing the stated rationale against the possibility for the repurchase authority to be misused, such as to repurchase shares from insiders at a premium to market price.

### **Stock Distributions: Splits and Dividends**

Vote FOR management proposals to increase the common share authorization for a stock split or share dividend, provided that the increase in authorized shares equal to or less than the allowable increase calculated in accordance with Victory's Common Stock Authorization policy.

### **Tracking Stock**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on the creation of tracking stock, weighing the strategic value of the transaction against such factors as:

- Adverse governance changes
- Excessive increases in authorized capital stock
- Unfair method of distribution
- Diminution of voting rights
- Adverse conversion features
- Negative impact on stock option plans
- Alternatives such as spin-off

### **Restructuring**

#### **Appraisal Rights**

Vote FOR proposals to restore or provide shareholders with rights of appraisal.

#### **Asset Purchases**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on asset purchase proposals, considering the following factors:



- Purchase price
- Fairness opinion
- Financial and strategic benefits
- How the deal was negotiated
- Conflicts of interest
- Other alternatives for the business
- Non-completion risk

### **Asset Sales**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on asset sales, considering the following factors:

- Impact on the balance sheet/working capital
- Potential elimination of diseconomies
- Anticipated financial and operating benefits
- Anticipated use of funds
- Value received for the asset
- Fairness opinion
- How the deal was negotiated
- Conflicts of interest

### **Bundled Proposals**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on bundled or “conditional” proxy proposals. In the case of items that are conditioned upon each other, examine the benefits and costs of the packaged items. In instances when the joint effect of the conditioned items is not in shareholders’ best interests, vote AGAINST the proposals. If the combined effect is positive, support such proposals.

### **Conversion of Securities**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals regarding conversion of securities. When evaluating these proposals the investor should review the dilution to existing shareholders, the conversion price relative to market value, financial issues, control issues, termination penalties, and conflicts of interest.

Vote FOR the conversion if it is expected that the company will be subject to onerous penalties or will be forced to file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

### **Corporate Reorganization/Debt Restructuring/Prepackaged Bankruptcy Plans/Reverse Leveraged Buyouts/Wrap Plans**

Vote CASE-BY- CASE on proposals to increase common and/or preferred shares and to issue shares as part of a debt restructuring plan, after evaluating:

- Dilution to existing shareholders' positions
- Terms of the offer - discount/premium in purchase price to investor, including any fairness opinion; termination penalties; exit strategy
- Financial issues - company's financial situation, degree of need for capital, use of proceeds, effect of the financing on the company's cost of capital
- Management's efforts to pursue other alternatives
- Control issues - change in management, change in control, guaranteed board and committee seats, standstill provisions, voting agreements, veto power over certain corporate actions
- Conflict of interest - arm's length transaction, managerial incentives

Vote FOR the debt restructuring if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

### Formation of Holding Company

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals regarding the formation of a holding company, taking into consideration the following:

- The reasons for the change
- Any financial or tax benefits
- Regulatory benefits
- Increases in capital structure
- Changes to the articles of incorporation or bylaws of the company

Absent compelling financial reasons to recommend the transaction, vote AGAINST the formation of a holding company if the transaction would include either of the following:

- Increases in common or preferred stock in excess of the allowable maximum (see discussion under "Capital")
- Adverse changes in shareholder rights

### Going Private and Going Dark Transactions (LBOs and Minority Squeeze-outs)

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on going private transactions, taking into account the following:

- Offer price/premium
- Fairness opinion
- How the deal was negotiated
- Conflicts of interest
- Other alternatives/offers considered
- Non-completion risk

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on going dark transactions, determining whether the transaction enhances shareholder value by taking into consideration:

- Whether the company has attained benefits from being publicly-traded (examination of trading volume, liquidity, and market research of the stock)
- Balanced interests of continuing vs. cashed-out shareholders, taking into account the following:
  - Are all shareholders able to participate in the transaction
  - Will there be a liquid market for remaining shareholders following the transaction
  - Does the company have strong corporate governance
  - Will insiders reap the gains of control following the proposed transaction
  - Does the state of incorporation have laws requiring continued reporting that may benefit shareholders

### Joint Ventures

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals to form joint ventures, taking into account the following:

- Percentage of assets/business contributed
- Percentage ownership
- Financial and strategic benefits
- Governance structure
- Conflicts of interest
- Other alternatives
- Non-completion risk

## Liquidations

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on liquidations, taking into account the following:

- Management's efforts to pursue other alternatives
- Appraisal value of assets
- The compensation plan for executives managing the liquidation

Vote FOR the liquidation if the company will file for bankruptcy if the proposal is not approved.

## Mergers and Acquisitions

Vote CASE –BY- CASE on mergers and acquisitions. Review and evaluate the merits and drawbacks of the proposed transaction, balancing various and sometimes countervailing factors including:

- *Valuation* - Is the value to be received by the target shareholders (or paid by the acquirer) reasonable? While the fairness opinion may provide an initial starting point for assessing valuation reasonableness, emphasis is placed on the offer premium, market reaction and strategic rationale.
- *Market reaction* - How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction should cause closer scrutiny of a deal.
- *Strategic rationale* - Does the deal make sense strategically? From where is the value derived? Cost and revenue synergies should not be overly aggressive or optimistic, but reasonably achievable. Management should also have a favorable track record of successful integration of historical acquisitions.
- *Negotiations and process* - Were the terms of the transaction negotiated at arm's-length? Was the process fair and equitable? A fair process helps to ensure the best price for shareholders. Significant negotiation "wins" can also signify the deal makers' competency. The comprehensiveness of the sales process (e.g., full auction, partial auction, no auction) can also affect shareholder value.
- *Conflicts of interest* - Are insiders benefiting from the transaction disproportionately and inappropriately as compared to non-insider shareholders? As the result of potential conflicts, the directors and officers of the company may be more likely to vote to approve a merger than if they did not hold these interests. Consider whether these interests may have influenced these directors and officers to support or recommend the merger.
- *Governance* - Will the combined company have a better or worse governance profile than the current governance profiles of the respective parties to the transaction? If the governance profile is to change for the worse, the burden is on the company to prove that other issues (such as valuation) outweigh any deterioration in governance.

## Private Placements/Warrants/Convertible Debentures

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals regarding private placements, warrants, and convertible debentures taking into consideration:

- Dilution to existing shareholders' position: The amount and timing of shareholder ownership dilution should be weighed against the needs and proposed shareholder benefits of the capital infusion. Although newly issued common stock, absent preemptive rights, is typically dilutive to existing shareholders, share price appreciation is often the necessary event to trigger the exercise of "out of the money" warrants and convertible debt. In these instances from a value standpoint, the negative impact of dilution is mitigated by the increase in the company's stock price that must occur to trigger the dilutive event.

- Terms of the offer (discount/premium in purchase price to investor, including any fairness opinion, conversion features, termination penalties, exit strategy):
  - The terms of the offer should be weighed against the alternatives of the company and in light of company's financial condition. Ideally, the conversion price for convertible debt and the exercise price for warrants should be at a premium to the then prevailing stock price at the time of private placement.
  - When evaluating the magnitude of a private placement discount or premium, consider factors that influence the discount or premium, such as, liquidity, due diligence costs, control and monitoring costs, capital scarcity, information asymmetry and anticipation of future performance.
- Financial issues:
  - The company's financial condition;
  - Degree of need for capital;
  - Use of proceeds;
  - Effect of the financing on the company's cost of capital;
  - Current and proposed cash burn rate;
  - Going concern viability and the state of the capital and credit markets.
- Management's efforts to pursue alternatives and whether the company engaged in a process to evaluate alternatives: A fair, unconstrained process helps to ensure the best price for shareholders. Financing alternatives can include joint ventures, partnership, merger or sale of part or all of the company.
- Control issues:
  - Change in management;
  - Change in control;
  - Guaranteed board and committee seats;
  - Standstill provisions;
  - Voting agreements;
  - Veto power over certain corporate actions; and
  - Minority versus majority ownership and corresponding minority discount or majority control premium
- Conflicts of interest:
  - Conflicts of interest should be viewed from the perspective of the company and the investor.
  - Were the terms of the transaction negotiated at arm's length? Are managerial incentives aligned with shareholder interests?
- Market reaction:
  - The market's response to the proposed deal. A negative market reaction is a cause for concern. Market reaction may be addressed by analyzing the one day impact on the unaffected stock price.

Vote *FOR* the private placement, or *FOR* the issuance of warrants and/or convertible debentures in a private placement, if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

### **Reorganization/Restructuring Plan (Bankruptcy)**

Vote *CASE-BY-CASE* on proposals to common shareholders on bankruptcy plans of reorganization, considering the following factors including, but not limited to:

- Estimated value and financial prospects of the reorganized company;

- Percentage ownership of current shareholders in the reorganized company;
- Whether shareholders are adequately represented in the reorganization process (particularly through the existence of an Official Equity Committee);
- The cause(s) of the bankruptcy filing, and the extent to which the plan of reorganization addresses the cause(s);
- Existence of a superior alternative to the plan of reorganization; and
- Governance of the reorganized company.

### **Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs)**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on SPAC mergers and acquisitions taking into account the following:

- Valuation – Is the value being paid by the SPAC reasonable? SPACs generally lack an independent fairness opinion and the financials on the target may be limited. Compare the conversion price with the intrinsic value of the target company provided in the fairness opinion. Also, evaluate the proportionate value of the combined entity attributable to the SPAC IPO shareholders versus the pre-merger value of SPAC. Additionally, a private company discount may be applied to the target, if it is a private entity.
- Market reaction – How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction may be a cause for concern. Market reaction may be addressed by analyzing the one-day impact on the unaffected stock price.
- Deal timing – A main driver for most transactions is that the SPAC charter typically requires the deal to be complete within 18 to 24 months, or the SPAC is to be liquidated. Evaluate the valuation, market reaction, and potential conflicts of interest for deals that are announced close to the liquidation date.
- Negotiations and process – What was the process undertaken to identify potential target companies within specified industry or location specified in charter? Consider the background of the sponsors.
- Conflicts of interest – How are sponsors benefiting from the transaction compared to IPO shareholders? Potential conflicts could arise if a fairness opinion is issued by the insiders to qualify the deal rather than a third party or if management is encouraged to pay a higher price for the target because of an 80% rule (the charter requires that the fair market value of the target is at least equal to 80% of net assets of the SPAC). Also, there may be sense of urgency by the management team of the SPAC to close the deal since its charter typically requires a transaction to be completed within the 18-24 month timeframe.
- Voting agreements – Are the sponsors entering into any voting agreements/ tender offers with shareholders who are likely to vote AGAINST the proposed merger or exercise conversion rights?
- Governance – What is the impact of having the SPAC CEO or founder on key committees following the proposed merger?

### **Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs) – Proposals for Extensions**

Vote case-by-case on SPAC extension proposals taking into account the length of the requested extension, the status of any pending transaction(s) or progression of the acquisition process, any added incentive for non-redeeming shareholders, and any prior extension requests.

- Length of request: Typically, extension requests range from two to six months, depending on the progression of the SPAC's acquisition process.

- Pending transaction(s) or progression of the acquisition process: Sometimes an initial business combination was already put to a shareholder vote, but, for varying reasons, the transaction could not be consummated by the termination date and the SPAC is requesting an extension. Other times, the SPAC has entered into a definitive transaction agreement, but needs additional time to consummate or hold the shareholder meeting.
- Added incentive for non-redeeming shareholders: Sometimes the SPAC sponsor (or other insiders) will contribute, typically as a loan to the company, additional funds that will be added to the redemption value of each public share as long as such shares are not redeemed in connection with the extension request. The purpose of the "equity kicker" is to incentivize shareholders to hold their shares through the end of the requested extension or until the time the transaction is put to a shareholder vote, rather than electing redemption at the extension proposal meeting.
- Prior extension requests: Some SPACs request additional time beyond the extension period sought in prior extension requests.

### **Spin-offs**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on spin-offs, considering:

- Tax and regulatory advantages;
- Planned use of the sale proceeds;
- Valuation of spinoff;
- Fairness opinion;
- Benefits to the parent company;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Managerial incentives;
- Corporate governance changes;
- Changes in the capital structure.

### **Value Maximization Shareholder Proposals**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder proposals seeking to maximize shareholder value by:

- Hiring a financial advisor to explore strategic alternatives;
- Selling the company; or
- Liquidating the company and distributing the proceeds to shareholders.

These proposals should be evaluated based on the following factors:

- Prolonged poor performance with no turnaround in sight;
- Signs of entrenched board and management (such as the adoption of takeover defenses);
- Strategic plan in place for improving value;
- Likelihood of receiving reasonable value in a sale or dissolution; and
- The company actively exploring its strategic options, including retaining a financial advisor.

## COMPENSATION

### Executive Pay Evaluation

Executive pay remains a perennial hot button issue for shareholders, who want assurance that top management's compensation is primarily performance-based, fair, and reasonable. Any evaluation of executive pay must recognize two underlying forces: an executive labor market, where executive pay packages result from negotiations in a war for talent, and an agency problem, where boards and shareholders try to align pay incentives with shareholder value creation.

Underlying all evaluations are five global principles that most investors expect corporations to adhere to in designing and administering executive and director compensation programs:

1. Maintain appropriate pay-for-performance alignment, with emphasis on long-term shareholder value: This principle encompasses overall executive pay practices, which must be designed to attract, retain, and appropriately motivate the key employees who drive shareholder value creation over the long term. It will take into consideration, among other factors, the link between pay and performance; the mix between fixed and variable pay; performance goals; and equity-based plan costs;
2. Avoid arrangements that risk "pay for failure": This principle addresses the appropriateness of long or indefinite contracts, excessive severance packages, and guaranteed compensation;
3. Maintain an independent and effective compensation committee: This principle promotes oversight of executive pay programs by directors with appropriate skills, knowledge, experience, and a sound process for compensation decision-making (e.g., including access to independent expertise and advice when needed);
4. Provide shareholders with clear, comprehensive compensation disclosures: This principle underscores the importance of informative and timely disclosures that enable shareholders to evaluate executive pay practices fully and fairly;
5. Avoid inappropriate pay to non-executive directors: This principle recognizes the interests of shareholders in ensuring that compensation to outside directors does not compromise their independence and ability to make appropriate judgments in overseeing managers' pay and performance. At the market level, it may incorporate a variety of generally accepted best practices.

### Advisory Votes on Executive Compensation- Management Proposals (Management Say-on-Pay)

Evaluate executive pay and practices, as well as certain aspects of outside director compensation CASE-BY-CASE.

Vote AGAINST management say on pay (MSOP) proposals, AGAINST/WITHHOLD on compensation committee members (or, in rare cases where the full board is deemed responsible, all directors including the CEO), and/or AGAINST an equity-based incentive plan proposal if:

- There is a misalignment between CEO pay and company performance (pay for performance)
- The company maintains problematic pay practices
- The board exhibits poor communication and responsiveness to shareholders.

### Voting Alternatives

In general, the management say on pay (MSOP) ballot item is the primary focus of voting on executive pay practices-- dissatisfaction with compensation practices can be expressed by voting against MSOP rather than withholding or voting against the compensation committee. However, if there is no MSOP on the ballot, then the negative vote will apply to members of the compensation committee. In addition, in egregious cases, or if the board fails to respond to concerns raised by a prior MSOP proposal, then vote withhold or against compensation committee members (or, if the full board is deemed accountable, all directors). If the negative factors involve equity-based compensation, then vote AGAINST an equity-based plan proposal presented for shareholder approval.

Additional CASE-BY-CASE considerations for the management say on pay (MSOP) proposals:

- Evaluation of performance metrics in short-term and long-term plans, as discussed and explained in the Compensation Discussion & Analysis (CD&A). Consider the measures, goals, and target awards reported by the company for executives' short- and long-term incentive awards: disclosure, explanation of their alignment with the company's business strategy, and whether goals appear to be sufficiently challenging in relation to resulting payouts
- Evaluation of peer group benchmarking used to set target pay or award opportunities. Consider the rationale stated by the company for constituents in its pay benchmarking peer group, as well as the benchmark targets it uses to set or validate executives' pay (e.g., median, 75th percentile, etc.) to ascertain whether the benchmarking process is sound or may result in pay "ratcheting" due to inappropriate peer group constituents (e.g., much larger companies) or targeting (e.g., above median)
- Balance of performance-based versus non-performance-based pay. Consider the ratio of performance-based (not including plain vanilla stock options) vs. non-performance-based pay elements reported for the CEO's latest reported fiscal year compensation, especially in conjunction with concerns about other factors such as performance metrics/goals, benchmarking practices, and pay-for-performance disconnects.

### **Primary Evaluation Factors for Executive Pay**

#### ***Pay for Performance***

Evaluate the alignment of the CEO's pay with performance over time, focusing particularly on companies that have underperformed their peers over a sustained period. From a shareholders' perspective, performance is predominantly gauged by the company's stock performance over time. Even when financial or operational measures are utilized in incentive awards, the achievement related to these measures should ultimately translate into superior shareholder returns in the long-term.

Focus on companies with sustained underperformance relative to peers, considering the following key factors:

- Whether a company's one-year and three-year total shareholder returns ("TSR") are in the bottom half of its industry group (i.e., four-digit GICS – Global Industry Classification Group)
- Whether the total compensation of a CEO who has served at least two consecutive fiscal years is aligned with the company's total shareholder return over time, including both recent and long-term periods

If a company falls in the bottom half of its four-digit GICS, further analysis of the CD&A is required to better understand the various pay elements and whether they create or reinforce shareholder alignment. Also assess the CEO's pay relative to the company's TSR over a time horizon of at least five years. The most recent year-over-year increase or decrease in pay remains a key consideration, but there will be additional emphasis on the long term trend of CEO total compensation relative to shareholder return. Also consider the mix of performance-based compensation relative to total compensation. In general, standard stock options or time-vested restricted stock are not considered to be performance-based. If a company provides performance-based incentives to its executives, the company is highly encouraged to provide the complete disclosure of the performance measure and goals (hurdle rate) so that shareholders can assess the rigor of the performance program. The use of non-GAAP financial metrics also makes it very challenging for shareholders to ascertain the rigor of the program as shareholders often cannot tell the type of adjustments being made and if the adjustments were made consistently. Complete and transparent disclosure helps shareholders to better understand the company's pay for performance linkage.

#### ***Problematic Pay Practices***

If the company maintains problematic pay practices, generally vote:



- AGAINST management "say on pay" (MSOP) proposals;
- AGAINST/WITHHOLD on compensation committee members (or in rare cases where the full board is deemed responsible, all directors including the CEO):
  - In egregious situations;
  - When no MSOP item is on the ballot; or
  - When the board has failed to respond to concerns raised in prior MSOP evaluations; and/or
- AGAINST an equity incentive plan proposal if excessive non-performance-based equity awards are the major contributors to a pay-for-performance misalignment.

The focus is on executive compensation practices that contravene the global pay principles, including:

- Problematic practices related to non-performance-based compensation elements;
- Incentives that may motivate excessive risk-taking; and
- Options Backdating.

#### **Problematic Pay Practices related to Non-Performance-Based Compensation Elements**

Pay elements that are not directly based on performance are generally evaluated CASE-BY-CASE considering the context of a company's overall pay program and demonstrated pay-for-performance philosophy. The list below highlights the problematic practices that carry significant weight in this overall consideration and may result in adverse vote recommendations:

- Repricing or replacing of underwater stock options/SARS without prior shareholder approval (including cash buyouts and voluntary surrender of underwater options);
- Excessive perquisites or tax gross-ups, including any gross-up related to a secular trust or restricted stock vesting;
- New or extended agreements that provide for:
  - CIC payments exceeding 3 times base salary and average/target/most recent bonus
  - CIC severance payments without involuntary job loss or substantial diminution of duties ("single" or "modified single" triggers)
  - CIC payments with excise tax gross-ups (including "modified" gross-ups)

#### **Insufficient Executive Compensation Disclosure by Externally Managed Issuers (EMIs)**

For externally-managed issuers (EMIs), generally vote against the say-on-pay proposal when insufficient compensation disclosure precludes a reasonable assessment of pay programs and practices applicable to the EMI's executives.

#### **Incentives that may Motivate Excessive Risk-Taking**

Assess company policies and disclosure related to compensation that could incentivize excessive risk-taking, for example:

- Multi-year guaranteed bonuses
- A single performance metric used for short- and long-term plans
- Lucrative severance packages
- High pay opportunities relative to industry peers;
- Disproportionate supplemental pensions
- Mega annual equity grants that provide unlimited upside with no downside risk

Factors that potentially mitigate the impact of risky incentives include rigorous claw-back provisions and robust stock ownership/holding guidelines.

### **Options Backdating**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on options backdating issues. Generally, when a company has recently practiced options backdating, WITHHOLD from or vote AGAINST the compensation committee, depending on the severity of the practices and the subsequent corrective actions on the part of the board. When deciding on votes on compensation committee members who oversaw questionable options grant practices or current compensation committee members who fail to respond to the issue proactively, consider several factors, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Reason and motive for the options backdating issue, such as inadvertent vs. deliberate grant date changes;
- Duration of options backdating;
- Size of restatement due to options backdating;
- Corrective actions taken by the board or compensation committee, such as canceling or re-pricing backdated options, the recouping of option gains on backdated grants; and
- Adoption of a grant policy that prohibits backdating, and creates a fixed grant schedule or window period for equity grants in the future.

A CASE-BY-CASE analysis approach allows distinctions to be made between companies that had “sloppy” plan administration versus those that acted deliberately and/or committed fraud, as well as those companies that subsequently took corrective action. Cases where companies have committed fraud are considered most egregious.

### **Board Communications and Responsiveness**

Consider the following factors CASE-BY-CASE when evaluating ballot items related to executive pay:

- Poor disclosure practices, including:
  - Unclear explanation of how the CEO is involved in the pay setting process
  - Retrospective performance targets and methodology not discussed
  - Methodology for benchmarking practices and/or peer group not disclosed and explained
- Board’s responsiveness to investor input and engagement on compensation issues, for example:
  - Failure to respond to majority-supported shareholder proposals on executive pay topics
  - Failure to respond to concerns raised in connection with significant opposition to MSOP proposals

### **Frequency of Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation ("Say When on Pay")**

Vote FOR annual advisory votes on compensation, which provide the most consistent and clear communication channel for shareholder concerns about companies' executive pay programs.

### **Voting on Golden Parachutes in an Acquisition, Merger, Consolidation, or Proposed Sale**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on say on Golden Parachute proposals, including consideration of existing change-in-control arrangements maintained with named executive officers rather than focusing primarily on new or extended arrangements.

Features that may result in an AGAINST recommendation include one or more of the following, depending on the number, magnitude, and/or timing of issue(s):

- Single- or modified-single-trigger cash severance

- Single-trigger acceleration of unvested equity awards
- Excessive cash severance (>3x base salary and bonus)
- Excise tax gross-ups triggered and payable (as opposed to a provision to provide excise tax gross-ups)
- Excessive golden parachute payments (on an absolute basis or as a percentage of transaction equity value)
- Recent amendments that incorporate any problematic features (such as those above) or recent actions (such as extraordinary equity grants) that may make packages so attractive as to influence merger agreements that may not be in the best interests of shareholders
- The company's assertion that a proposed transaction is conditioned on shareholder approval of the golden parachute advisory vote

Recent amendment(s) that incorporate problematic features will tend to carry more weight on the overall analysis. However, the presence of multiple legacy problematic features will also be closely scrutinized. In cases where the golden parachute vote is incorporated into a company's advisory vote on compensation (management say-on-pay), Victory Capital will evaluate the say-on-pay proposal in accordance with these guidelines, which may give higher weight to that component of the overall evaluation.

### Equity-Based and Other Incentive Plans

**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on certain equity-based compensation plans depending on a combination of certain plan features and equity grant practices, where positive factors may counterbalance negative factors, and vice versa, as evaluated using an "equity plan scorecard" (EPSC) approach with three pillars:

- **Plan Cost:** The total estimated cost of the company's equity plans relative to industry/market cap peers, measured by the company's estimated Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) in relation to peers and considering both:
  - SVT based on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants, plus outstanding unvested/unexercised grants
  - SVT based only on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants
- **Plan Features:**
  - Quality of disclosure around vesting upon a change in control (CIC)
  - Discretionary vesting authority
  - Liberal share recycling on various award types
  - Lack of minimum vesting period for grants made under the plan
  - Dividends payable prior to award vesting
- **Grant Practices:**
  - The company's three year burn rate relative to its industry/market cap peers
  - Vesting requirements in most recent CEO equity grants (3-year look-back)
  - The estimated duration of the plan (based on the sum of shares remaining available and the new shares requested, divided by the average annual shares granted in the prior three years)
  - The proportion of the CEO's most recent equity grants/awards subject to performance conditions
  - Whether the company maintains a sufficient claw-back policy
  - Whether the company maintains sufficient post exercise/vesting share-holding requirements

Generally vote against the plan proposal if the combination of above factors indicates that the plan is not, overall, in shareholders' interests, or if any of the following egregious factors ("overriding factors") apply:

- Awards may vest in connection with a liberal change-of-control definition
- The plan would permit repricing or cash buyout of underwater options without shareholder approval (either by expressly permitting it – for NYSE and Nasdaq listed companies -- or by not prohibiting it when the company has a history of repricing – for non-listed companies)
- The plan is a vehicle for problematic pay practices or a significant pay-for-performance disconnect under certain circumstances
- The plan contains an evergreen (automatic share replenishment) feature, or
- Any other plan features are determined to have a significant negative impact on shareholder interests

### **Plan Cost**

**General Recommendation:** Generally vote against equity plans if the cost is unreasonable. For non-employee director plans, vote for the plan if certain factors are met (see Director Compensation section).

### **Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT)**

The cost of the equity plans is expressed as Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT), which is measured using a binomial option pricing model that assesses the amount of shareholders' equity flowing out of the company to employees and directors. SVT is expressed as both a dollar amount and as a percentage of market value, and includes the new shares proposed, shares available under existing plans, and shares granted but unexercised (using two measures, in the case of plans subject to the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation, as noted above). All award types are valued. For omnibus plans, unless limitations are placed on the most expensive types of awards (for example, full value awards), the assumption is made that all awards to be granted will be the most expensive types. See discussion of specific types of awards.

Except for proposals subject to Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation, Shareholder Value Transfer is reasonable if it falls below a company-specific benchmark. The benchmark is determined as follows: The top quartile performers in each industry group (using the Global Industry Classification Standard: GICS) are identified. Benchmark SVT levels for each industry are established based on these top performers' historic SVT. Regression analyses are run on each industry group to identify the variables most strongly correlated to SVT. The benchmark industry SVT level is then adjusted upwards or downwards for the specific company by plugging the company-specific performance measures, size and cash compensation into the industry cap equations to arrive at the company's benchmark.<sup>5</sup>

### **Grant Practices**

#### ***Three-Year Burn Rate***

Burn rate benchmarks (utilized in Equity Plan Scorecard evaluations) are calculated as the greater of: (1) the mean ( $\mu$ ) plus one standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) of the company's GICS group segmented by S&P 500, Russell 3000 index (less the S&P500) and non-Russell 3000 index; and (2) two percent of weighted common shares outstanding. In addition, year-over-year burn-rate benchmark changes will be limited to a maximum of two (2) percentage points plus or minus the prior year's burn-rate benchmark.

### **Egregious Factors**

#### ***Liberal Change in Control Definition***

Generally vote against equity plans if the plan has a liberal definition of change in control and the equity awards could vest upon such liberal definition of change-in-control, even though an actual change in control may not occur. Examples of such a definition include, but are not limited to, announcement or commencement of a tender offer, provisions for acceleration upon a "potential" takeover, shareholder approval of a merger or other transactions, or similar language.

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<sup>5</sup> For plans evaluated under the Equity Plan Scorecard policy, the company's SVT benchmark is considered along with other factors.

### **Repricing Provisions**

Vote against plans that expressly permit the repricing or exchange of underwater stock options/stock appreciate rights (SARs) without prior shareholder approval. "Repricing" includes the ability to do any of the following:

- Amend the terms of outstanding options or SARs to reduce the exercise price of such outstanding options or SARs
- Cancel outstanding options or SARs in exchange for options or SARs with an exercise price that is less than the exercise price of the original options or SARs

Also, vote against or withhold from members of the Compensation Committee who approved and/or implemented a repricing or an option/SAR exchange program, by buying out underwater options/SARs for stock, cash or other consideration or canceling underwater options/SARs and regranting options/SARs with a lower exercise price, without prior shareholder approval, even if such repricings are allowed in their equity plan.

Vote against plans if the company has a history of repricing without shareholder approval, and the applicable listing standards would not preclude them from doing so.

### **Problematic Pay Practices or Significant Pay-for-Performance Disconnect**

If the equity plan on the ballot is a vehicle for **problematic pay practices**, vote against the plan.

If a significant portion of the CEO's misaligned pay is attributed to non-performance-based equity awards, and there is an equity plan on the ballot with the CEO as one of the participants, Victory vote against the equity plan. Considerations in voting against the equity plan may include, but are not limited to:

- Magnitude of pay misalignment
- Contribution of non-performance-based equity grants to overall pay
- The proportion of equity awards granted in the last three fiscal years concentrated at the named executive officer level

### **Specific Treatment of Certain Award Types in Equity Plan Evaluations:**

#### ***Dividend Equivalent Rights***

Options that have Dividend Equivalent Rights (DERs) associated with them will have a higher calculated award value than those without DERs under the binomial model, based on the value of these dividend streams. The higher value will be applied to new shares, shares available under existing plans, and shares awarded but not exercised per the plan specifications. DERs transfer more shareholder equity to employees and non-employee directors and this cost should be captured.

#### ***Operating Partnership (OP) units in Equity Plan analysis of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)***

For Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), include the common shares issuable upon conversion of outstanding Operating Partnership (OP) units in the share count for the purposes of determining: (1) market capitalization in the Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) analysis and (2) shares outstanding in the burn rate analysis.

### **Other Compensation Plans**

#### ***401(k) Employee Benefit Plans***

Vote FOR proposals to implement a 401(k) savings plan for employees.

**Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs)**

Vote FOR proposals to implement an ESOP or increase authorized shares for existing ESOPs, unless the number of shares allocated to the ESOP is excessive (more than five percent of outstanding shares).

**Employee Stock Purchase Plans-- Qualified Plans**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on qualified employee stock purchase plans. Vote FOR employee stock purchase plans where all of the following apply:

- Purchase price is at least 85 percent of fair market value
- Offering period is 27 months or less
- The number of shares allocated to the plan is ten percent or less of the outstanding shares

Vote AGAINST qualified employee stock purchase plans where any of the following apply:

- Purchase price is less than 85 percent of fair market value
- Offering period is greater than 27 months
- The number of shares allocated to the plan is more than ten percent of the outstanding shares

**Employee Stock Purchase Plans-- Non-Qualified Plans**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on nonqualified employee stock purchase plans. Vote FOR nonqualified employee stock purchase plans with all the following features:

- Broad-based participation (i.e., all employees of the company with the exclusion of individuals with 5 percent or more of beneficial ownership of the company)
- Limits on employee contribution, which may be a fixed dollar amount or expressed as a percent of base salary
- Company matching contribution up to 25 percent of employee's contribution, which is effectively a discount of 20 percent from market value
- No discount on the stock price on the date of purchase since there is a company matching contribution

Vote AGAINST nonqualified employee stock purchase plans when any of the plan features do not meet the above criteria. If the company matching contribution exceeds 25 percent of employee's contribution, evaluate the cost of the plan against its allowable cap.

**Incentive Bonus Plans and Tax Deductibility Proposals (OBRA-Related Compensation Proposals)**

Vote FOR proposals that simply amend shareholder-approved compensation plans to include administrative features or place a cap on the annual grants any one participant may receive to comply with the provisions of Section 162(m) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Vote FOR proposals to add performance goals to existing compensation plans to comply with the provisions of Section 162(m) unless they are clearly inappropriate.

Votes to amend existing plans to increase shares reserved and to qualify for favorable tax treatment under the provisions of Section 162(m) are considered CASE-BY-CASE.

Generally vote FOR cash or cash and stock bonus plans that are submitted to shareholders for the purpose of exempting compensation from taxes under the provisions of Section 162(m) if no increase in shares is requested.

Vote AGAINST proposals if the compensation committee does not fully consist of independent outsiders, or if the plan contains excessive problematic provisions.

***Option Exchange Programs/Repricing Options***

Vote AGAINST proposals seeking the authority to reprice options.

Vote AGAINST proposals seeking to approve an option exchange program.

***Stock Plans in Lieu of Cash***

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on plans that provide participants with the option of taking all or a portion of their cash compensation in the form of stock.

Vote FOR non-employee director-only equity plans that provide a dollar-for-dollar cash-for-stock exchange.

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on plans which do not provide a dollar-for-dollar cash for stock exchange. In cases where the exchange is not dollar-for-dollar, the request for new or additional shares for such equity program will be considered using the binomial option pricing model. In an effort to capture the total cost of total compensation, Victory will not make any adjustments to carve out the in-lieu-of cash compensation.

***Shareholder Ratification of Director Pay Programs***

Vote case-by-case on management proposals seeking ratification of non-employee director compensation, based on the following factors:

- If the equity plan under which non-employee director grants are made is on the ballot, whether or not it warrants support; and
- An assessment of the following qualitative factors:
  - The relative magnitude of director compensation as compared to companies of a similar profile
  - The presence of problematic pay practices relating to director compensation
  - Director stock ownership guidelines and holding requirements
  - Equity award vesting schedules
  - The mix of cash and equity-based compensation
  - Meaningful limits on director compensation
  - The availability of retirement benefits or perquisites
  - The quality of disclosure surrounding director compensation

***Transfer Stock Option (TSO) Programs***

One-time Transfers: Vote AGAINST or WITHHOLD from compensation committee members if they fail to submit one-time transfers to shareholders for approval.

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on one-time transfers. Vote FOR if:

- Executive officers and non-employee directors are excluded from participating
- Stock options are purchased by third-party financial institutions at a discount to their fair value using option pricing models such as Black-Scholes or a Binomial Option Valuation or other appropriate financial models
- There is a two-year minimum holding period for sale proceeds (cash or stock) for all participants

Additionally, management should provide a clear explanation of why options are being transferred to a third-party institution and whether the events leading up to a decline in stock price were beyond management's control. A review of the company's historic stock price volatility should indicate if the options are likely to be back "in-the-money" over the near term.

Ongoing TSO program: Vote AGAINST equity plan proposals if the details of ongoing TSO programs are not provided to shareholders. Since TSOs will be one of the award types under a stock plan, the ongoing TSO program, structure and mechanics must be disclosed to shareholders. The specific criteria to be considered in evaluating these proposals include, but not limited, to the following:

- Eligibility
- Vesting
- Bid-price
- Term of options
- Cost of the program and impact of the TSOs on company's total option expense
- Option repricing policy

Amendments to existing plans that allow for introduction of transferability of stock options should make clear that only options granted post-amendment shall be transferable.

### **Director Compensation**

#### **Equity Plans for Non-Employee Directors**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on compensation plans for non-employee directors, based on the following factors:

- The total estimated cost of the company's equity plans relative to industry/market cap peers, measured by the company's estimated Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) based on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants, plus outstanding unvested/unexercised grants
- The company's three-year burn rate relative to its industry/market cap peers
- The presence of any egregious plan features (such as an option repricing provision or liberal CIC vesting risk).

On occasion, director stock plans will exceed the plan cost or burn rate benchmarks when combined with employee or executive stock plans. In such cases, vote case-by-case on the plan taking into consideration the following qualitative factors:

- The relative magnitude of director compensation as compared to companies of a similar profile
- The presence of problematic pay practices relating to director compensation
- Director stock ownership guidelines and holding requirements
- Equity award vesting schedules
- The mix of cash and equity-based compensation
- Meaningful limits on director compensation
- The availability of retirement benefits or perquisites
- The quality of disclosure surrounding director compensation

### **Director Retirement Plans**

Vote AGAINST retirement plans for non-employee directors.

Vote FOR shareholder proposals to eliminate retirement plans for non-employee directors.



## Shareholder Proposals on Compensation

### Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation (Say-on-Pay)

Generally, vote FOR shareholder proposals that call for non-binding shareholder ratification of the compensation of the Named Executive Officers and the accompanying narrative disclosure of material factors provided to understand the Summary Compensation Table.

### Adopt Anti-Hedging/Pledging/Speculative Investments Policy

Generally vote FOR proposals seeking a policy that prohibits named executive officers from engaging in derivative or speculative transactions involving company stock, including hedging, holding stock in a margin account, or pledging stock as collateral for a loan. However, the company's existing policies regarding responsible use of company stock will be considered.

### Bonus Banking/Bonus Banking "Plus"

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals seeking deferral of a portion of annual bonus pay, with ultimate payout linked to sustained results for the performance metrics on which the bonus was earned (whether for the named executive officers or a wider group of employees), taking into account the following factors:

- The company's past practices regarding equity and cash compensation;
- Whether the company has a holding period or stock ownership requirements in place, such as a meaningful retention ratio (at least 50 percent for full tenure); and
- Whether the company has a rigorous claw-back policy in place.

### Compensation Consultants- Disclosure of Board or Company's Utilization

Generally vote FOR shareholder proposals seeking disclosure regarding the Company, Board, or Compensation Committee's use of compensation consultants, such as company name, business relationship(s) and fees paid.

### Disclosure/Setting Levels or Types of Compensation for Executives and Directors

Generally, vote FOR shareholder proposals seeking additional disclosure of executive and director pay information, provided the information requested is relevant to shareholders' needs, would not put the company at a competitive disadvantage relative to its industry, and is not unduly burdensome to the company.

Vote AGAINST shareholder proposals seeking to set absolute levels on compensation or otherwise dictate the amount or form of compensation.

Vote AGAINST shareholder proposals seeking to eliminate stock options or any other equity grants to employees or directors.

Vote AGAINST shareholder proposals requiring director fees be paid in stock only.

Generally vote AGAINST shareholder proposals that mandate a minimum amount of stock that directors must own in order to qualify as a director or to remain on the board.

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on all other shareholder proposals regarding executive and director pay, taking into account company performance, pay level versus peers, pay level versus industry, and long-term corporate outlook.

### **Golden Coffins/Executive Death Benefits**

Generally vote FOR proposals calling companies to adopt a policy of obtaining shareholder approval for any future agreements and corporate policies that could oblige the company to make payments or awards following the death of a senior executive in the form of unearned salary or bonuses, accelerated vesting or the continuation in force of unvested equity grants, perquisites and other payments or awards made in lieu of compensation. This would not apply to any benefit programs or equity plan proposals that the broad-based employee population is eligible.

### **Hold Equity Past Retirement or for a Significant Period of Time**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder proposals asking companies to adopt policies requiring senior executive officers to retain all or a significant portion of the shares acquired through compensation plans, either:

- while employed and/or for two years following the termination of their employment
- for a substantial period following the lapse of all other vesting requirements for the award (“lock-up period”), with ratable release of a portion of the shares annually during the lock-up period

The following factors will be taken into account:

- Whether the company has any holding period, retention ratio, or officer ownership requirements in place. These should consist of:
  - Rigorous stock ownership guidelines
  - A holding period requirement coupled with a significant long-term ownership requirement
  - A meaningful retention ratio
- Actual officer stock ownership and the degree to which it meets or exceeds the proponent's suggested holding period/retention ratio or the company's own stock ownership or retention requirements;
- Post-termination holding requirement policies or any policies aimed at mitigating risk taking by senior executives;
- Problematic pay practices, current and past, which may promote a short-term versus a long-term focus.

A rigorous stock ownership guideline should be at least 10x base salary for the CEO, with the multiple declining for other executives. A meaningful retention ratio should constitute at least 50 percent of the stock received from equity awards (on a net proceeds basis) held on a long-term basis, such as the executive's tenure with the company or even a few years past the executive's termination with the company.

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder proposals asking companies to adopt policies requiring Named Executive Officers to retain 75% of the shares acquired through compensation plans while employed and/or for two years following the termination of their employment, and to report to shareholders regarding this policy. The following factors will be taken into account:

- Whether the company has any holding period, retention ratio, or officer ownership requirements in place. These should consist of:
  - Rigorous stock ownership guidelines
  - A holding period requirement coupled with a significant long-term ownership requirement
  - A meaningful retention ratio

- Actual officer stock ownership and the degree to which it meets or exceeds the proponent's suggested holding period/retention ratio or the company's own stock ownership or retention requirements.
- Problematic pay practices, current and past, which may promote a short-term versus a long-term focus.

A rigorous stock ownership guideline should be at least 10x base salary for the CEO, with the multiple declining for other executives. A meaningful retention ratio should constitute at least 50 percent of the stock received from equity awards (on a net proceeds basis) held on a long-term basis, such as the executive's tenure with the company or even a few years past the executive's termination with the company.

Generally vote AGAINST shareholder proposals that mandate a minimum amount of stock that directors must own in order to qualify as a director or to remain on the board. While Victory favors stock ownership on the part of directors, the company should determine the appropriate ownership requirement.

### **Non-Deductible Compensation**

Generally vote FOR proposals seeking disclosure of the extent to which the company paid non-deductible compensation to senior executives due to Internal Revenue Code Section 162(m), while considering the company's existing disclosure practices.

### **Pay for Performance**

#### ***Performance-Based Awards***

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder proposal requesting that a significant amount of future long-term incentive compensation awarded to senior executives shall be performance-based and requesting that the board adopt and disclose challenging performance metrics to shareholders, based on the following analytical steps:

- First, vote FOR shareholder proposals advocating the use of performance-based equity awards, such as performance contingent options or restricted stock, indexed options or premium-priced options, unless the proposal is overly restrictive or if the company has demonstrated that it is using a "substantial" portion of performance-based awards for its top executives. Standard stock options and performance-accelerated awards do not meet the criteria to be considered as performance-based awards. Further, premium-priced options should have a premium of at least 25 percent and higher to be considered performance-based awards.
- Second, assess the rigor of the company's performance-based equity program. If the bar set for the performance-based program is too low based on the company's historical or peer group comparison, generally vote FOR the proposal. Furthermore, if target performance results in an above target payout, vote FOR the shareholder proposal due to program's poor design. If the company does not disclose the performance metric of the performance-based equity program, vote FOR the shareholder proposal regardless of the outcome of the first step to the test.

In general, vote FOR the shareholder proposal if the company does not meet both of the above two steps.

#### ***Pay for Superior Performance***

Generally vote AGAINST, if a majority of pay is already linked to performance than proposal is redundant.

### **Pre-Arranged Trading Plans (10b5-1 Plans)**

Generally vote FOR shareholder proposals calling for certain principles regarding the use of prearranged trading plans (10b5-1 plans) for executives. These principles include:

- Adoption, amendment, or termination of a 10b5-1 Plan must be disclosed within two business days in a Form 8-K
- Amendment or early termination of a 10b5-1 Plan is allowed only under extraordinary circumstances, as determined by the board
- Ninety days must elapse between adoption or amendment of a 10b5-1 Plan and initial trading under the plan
- Reports on Form 4 must identify transactions made pursuant to a 10b5-1 Plan
- An executive may not trade in company stock outside the 10b5-1 Plan
- Trades under a 10b5-1 Plan must be handled by a broker who does not handle other securities transactions for the executive

### **Prohibit CEOs from serving on Compensation Committees**

Generally vote AGAINST proposals seeking a policy to prohibit any outside CEO from serving on a company's compensation committee, unless the company has demonstrated problematic pay practices that raise concerns about the performance and composition of the committee.

### **Recoup Bonuses**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals to recoup unearned incentive bonuses or other incentive payments made to senior executives if it is later determined that the figures upon which incentive compensation is earned later turn out to have been in error. This is line with the clawback provision in the Troubled Asset Relief Program. Many companies have adopted policies that permit recoupment in cases where fraud, misconduct, or negligence significantly contributed to a restatement of financial results that led to the awarding of unearned incentive compensation. Victory will take into consideration:

- If the company has adopted a formal recoupment bonus policy
- If the company has chronic restatement history or material financial problems
- If the company's policy substantially addresses the concerns raised by the proponent

### **Severance Agreements for Executives/Golden Parachutes**

Vote FOR shareholder proposals requiring that golden parachutes or executive severance agreements be submitted for shareholder ratification, unless the proposal requires shareholder approval *prior* to entering into employment contracts.

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals to ratify or cancel golden parachutes. An acceptable parachute should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- The triggering mechanism should be beyond the control of management
- The amount should not exceed three times base amount (defined as the average annual taxable W-2 compensation during the five years prior to the year in which the change of control occurs)
- Change-in-control payments should be double-triggered, i.e., (1) after a change in control has taken place, and (2) termination of the executive as a result of the change in control. Change in control is defined as a change in the company ownership structure.

### **Share Buyback Holding Periods**

Generally vote AGAINST shareholder proposals prohibiting executives from selling shares of company stock during periods in which the company has announced that it may or will be repurchasing shares of

its stock. Vote FOR the proposal when there is a pattern of abuse by executives exercising options or selling shares during periods of share buybacks.

### **Stock Retention/Holding Period**

Vote AGAINST shareholder proposals asking companies to adopt holding periods or retention ratios for their executives.

### **Supplemental Executive Retirement Plans (SERPs)**

Generally vote FOR shareholder proposals requesting to put extraordinary benefits contained in SERP agreements to a shareholder vote unless the company's executive pension plans do not contain excessive benefits beyond what is offered under employee-wide plans.

Generally vote FOR shareholder proposals requesting to limit the executive benefits provided under the company's supplemental executive retirement plan (SERP) by limiting covered compensation to a senior executive's annual salary and excluding of all incentive or bonus pay from the plan's definition of covered compensation used to establish such benefits.

### **Tax Gross-Up Proposals**

Generally vote FOR proposals calling for companies to adopt a policy of not providing tax gross-up payments to executives, except in situations where gross-ups are provided pursuant to a plan, policy, or arrangement applicable to management employees of the company, such as a relocation or expatriate tax equalization policy.

### **Termination of Employment Prior to Severance Payment and Eliminating Accelerated Vesting of Unvested Equity**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder proposals seeking a policy requiring termination of employment prior to severance payment, and eliminating accelerated vesting of unvested equity. Change-in-control payouts without loss of job or substantial diminution of job duties (single-triggered) are consider a poor pay practice under Victory policy, and may even result in withheld votes from compensation committee members. The second component of this proposal — related to the elimination of accelerated vesting — requires more careful consideration. The following factors will be taken into regarding this policy.

- The company's current treatment of equity in change-of-control situations (i.e. is it double triggered, does it allow for the assumption of equity by acquiring company, the treatment of performance shares.
- Current employment agreements, including potential poor pay practices such as gross-ups embedded in those agreements.

Generally vote FOR proposals seeking a policy that prohibits acceleration of the vesting of equity awards to senior executives in the event of a change in control (except for pro rata vesting considering the time elapsed and attainment of any related performance goals between the award date and the change in control).

## Social/Environmental Issues

### Overall Approach

When evaluating social and environmental shareholder proposals, Victory considers the following factors:

- Whether adoption of the proposal is likely to enhance or protect shareholder value
- Whether the information requested concerns business issues that relate to a meaningful percentage of the company's business as measured by sales, assets, and earnings
- The degree to which the company's stated position on the issues raised in the proposal could affect its reputation or sales, or leave it vulnerable to a boycott or selective purchasing
- Whether the issues presented are more appropriately/effectively dealt with through governmental or company-specific action
- Whether the company has already responded in some appropriate manner to the request embodied in the proposal
- Whether the company's analysis and voting recommendation to shareholders are persuasive
- What other companies have done in response to the issue addressed in the proposal
- Whether the proposal itself is well framed and the cost of preparing the report is reasonable
- Whether implementation of the proposal's request would achieve the proposal's objectives
- Whether the subject of the proposal is best left to the discretion of the board
- Whether the requested information is available to shareholders either from the company or from a publicly available source
- Whether providing this information would reveal proprietary or confidential information that would place the company at a competitive disadvantage

## Diversity

### Board Diversity

Generally vote AGAINST requests for reports on the company's efforts to diversify the board, if the company has a Board & Nominating Committee that has a practice of selecting candidates based on knowledge, experience, and skills regardless of gender or race.

For companies in the Russell 3000 or S&P 1500 indices, generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) at companies where there are no women on the company's board. Mitigating factors include:

- Until Feb. 1, 2021, a firm commitment, as stated in the proxy statement, to appoint at least one woman to the board within a year;
- The presence of a woman on the board at the preceding annual meeting and a firm commitment to appoint at least one woman to the board within a year; or
- Other relevant factors as applicable.

### Equality of Opportunity

Generally vote AGAINST proposals requesting a company disclose its diversity policies or initiatives, or proposals requesting disclosure of a company's comprehensive workforce diversity data, including requests for EEO-1 data, if the company already has a policy in place.

### Political Contributions

Generally vote for proposals requesting greater disclosure of a company's political contributions and trade association spending policies and activities, considering:

- The company's policies, and management and board oversight related to its direct political contributions and payments to trade associations or other groups that may be used for political purposes
- The company's disclosure regarding its support of, and participation in, trade associations or other groups that may make political contributions
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or litigation related to the company's political contributions or political activities

Generally vote against proposals asking a company to affirm political nonpartisanship in the workplace, so long as:

- There are no recent, significant controversies, fines, or litigation regarding the company's political contributions or trade association spending
- The company has procedures in place to ensure that employee contributions to company-sponsored political action committees (PACs) are strictly voluntary and prohibit coercion.

Vote against proposals asking for a list of company executives, directors, consultants, legal counsels, lobbyists, or investment bankers that have prior government service and whether such service had a bearing on the business of the company. Such a list would be burdensome to prepare without providing any meaningful information to shareholders

### **Lobbying**

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting information on a company's lobbying (including direct, indirect, and grassroots lobbying) activities, policies, or procedures, considering:

- The company's current disclosure of relevant lobbying policies, and management and board oversight
- The company's disclosure regarding trade associations or other groups that it supports, or is a member of, that engage in lobbying activities
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or litigation regarding the company's lobbying-related activities

### **General Sustainability Reporting Proposals**

Generally vote FOR proposals requesting the company to report on its policies, initiatives, and oversight mechanisms related to social, economic, and environmental sustainability, unless:

- The company already discloses similar information through existing reports or policies such as an Environment, Health, and Safety (EHS) report; a comprehensive Code of Corporate Conduct; and/or a Diversity Report
- The company has formally committed to the implementation of a reporting program based on Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) guidelines or a similar standard within a specified time frame

### **Climate Change/ Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions**

Generally vote FOR resolutions requesting that a company disclose information on the impact of climate change on the company's operations and investments considering:

- The company already provides current, publicly-available information on the impacts that climate change may have on the company as well as associated company policies and procedures to address related risks and/or opportunities
- The company's level of disclosure is at least comparable to that of industry peers

- There are no significant, controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's environmental performance

Generally vote FOR proposals requesting a report on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from company operations and/or products and operations, unless:

- The company already provides current, publicly-available information on the impacts that GHG emissions may have on the company as well as associated company policies and procedures to address related risks and/or opportunities
- The company's level of disclosure is comparable to that of industry peers
- There are no significant, controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's GHG emissions

Proposals that call for the adoption of GHG reduction goals from products and operations shall be evaluated based on the long-term economic interests of the advisory clients, taking into account:

- Overly prescriptive requests for the reduction in GHG emissions by specific amounts or within a specific time frame
- Whether company disclosure lags behind industry peers
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to GHG emissions
- The feasibility of reduction of GHGs given the company's product line and current technology
- Whether the company already provides meaningful disclosure on GHG emissions from its products and operations

### **Human Rights Risk Assessment**

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting that a company conduct an assessment of the human rights risks in its operations or in its supply chain, or report on its human rights risk assessment process, considering:

- The degree to which existing relevant policies and practices are disclosed, including information on the implementation of these policies and any related oversight mechanisms
- The company's industry and whether the company or its suppliers operate in countries or areas where there is a history of human rights concerns
- Recent, significant controversies, fines, or litigation regarding human rights involving the company or its suppliers, and whether the company has taken remedial steps
- Whether the proposal is unduly burdensome or overly prescriptive

### **Gender Pay Gaps**

Generally vote case-by-case on requests for reports on a company's pay data by gender, race or ethnicity or a report on a company's policies and goals to reduce any gender, race or ethnicity pay gap, taking into account:

- The company's current policies and disclosure related to both its diversity and inclusion policies and practices and its compensation philosophy and fair and equitable compensation practices
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to gender, race or ethnicity pay gap issues
- Whether the company's reporting regarding gender, race or ethnicity pay gap policies or initiatives is lagging its peers



## Mutual Fund Proxies

### Election of Directors

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on the election of directors and trustees, following the same guidelines for uncontested directors for public company shareholder meetings. However, mutual fund boards do not usually have compensation committees, so do not withhold for the lack of this committee.

### Converting Closed-end Fund to Open-end Fund

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on conversion proposals, considering the following factors:

- Past performance as a closed-end fund
- Market in which the fund invests
- Measures taken by the board to address the discount
- Past shareholder activism, board activity, and votes on related proposals

### Proxy Contests

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proxy contests, considering the following factors:

- Past performance relative to its peers
- Market in which fund invests
- Measures taken by the board to address the issues
- Past shareholder activism, board activity, and votes on related proposals
- Strategy of the incumbents versus the dissidents
- Independence of directors
- Experience and skills of director candidates
- Governance profile of the company
- Evidence of management entrenchment

### Investment Advisory Agreements

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on investment advisory agreements, considering the following factors:

- Proposed and current fee schedules
- Fund category/investment objective
- Performance benchmarks
- Share price performance as compared with peers
- Resulting fees relative to peers
- Assignments (where the advisor undergoes a change of control)

### Approving New Classes or Series of Shares

Vote FOR the establishment of new classes or series of shares.

### Preferred Stock Proposals

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on the authorization for or increase in preferred shares, considering the following factors:

- Stated specific financing purpose
- Possible dilution for common shares
- Whether the shares can be used for antitakeover purposes

### 1940 Act Policies

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on policies under the Investment Advisor Act of 1940, considering the following factors:

- Potential competitiveness
- Regulatory developments
- Current and potential returns

- Current and potential risk

Generally vote FOR these amendments as long as the proposed changes do not fundamentally alter the investment focus of the fund and do comply with the current SEC interpretation.

### **Changing a Fundamental Restriction to a Nonfundamental Restriction**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals to change a fundamental restriction to a non-fundamental restriction, considering the following factors:

- The fund's target investments
- The reasons given by the fund for the change
- The projected impact of the change on the portfolio

### **Change Fundamental Investment Objective to Nonfundamental**

Vote AGAINST proposals to change a fund's fundamental investment objective to non-fundamental.

### **Name Change Proposals**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on name change proposals, considering the following factors:

- Political/economic changes in the target market
- Consolidation in the target market
- Current asset composition

### **Change in Fund's Subclassification**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on changes in a fund's sub-classification, considering the following factors:

- Potential competitiveness
- Current and potential returns
- Risk of concentration
- Consolidation in target industry

### **Disposition of Assets/Termination/Liquidation**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals to dispose of assets, to terminate or liquidate, considering the following factors:

- Strategies employed to salvage the company
- The fund's past performance
- The terms of the liquidation

### **Changes to the Charter Document**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on changes to the charter document, considering the following factors:

- The degree of change implied by the proposal
- The efficiencies that could result
- The state of incorporation
- Regulatory standards and implications

Vote AGAINST any of the following changes:

- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to reorganize or terminate the trust or any of its series
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement for amendments to the new declaration of trust
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to amend the fund's management contract, allowing the contract to be modified by the investment manager and the trust management, as permitted by the 1940 Act

- Allow the trustees to impose other fees in addition to sales charges on investment in a fund, such as deferred sales charges and redemption fees that may be imposed upon redemption of a fund's shares
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to engage in and terminate subadvisory arrangements
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to change the domicile of the fund

### **Changing the Domicile of a Fund**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on re-incorporations, considering the following factors:

- Regulations of both states
- Required fundamental policies of both states
- The increased flexibility available

### **Authorizing the Board to Hire and Terminate Subadvisors Without Shareholder Approval**

Vote AGAINST proposals authorizing the board to hire/terminate subadvisors without shareholder approval.

### **Distribution Agreements**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on distribution agreement proposals, considering the following factors:

- Fees charged to comparably sized funds with similar objectives
- The proposed distributor's reputation and past performance
- The competitiveness of the fund in the industry
- The terms of the agreement

### **Master-Feeder Structure**

Vote FOR the establishment of a master-feeder structure.

### **Mergers**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on merger proposals, considering the following factors:

- Resulting fee structure
- Performance of both funds
- Continuity of management personnel
- Changes in corporate governance and their impact on shareholder rights

### **Shareholder Proposals for Mutual Funds**

#### **Establish Director Ownership Requirement**

Generally vote AGAINST shareholder proposals that mandate a specific minimum amount of stock that directors must own in order to qualify as a director or to remain on the board.

#### **Reimburse Shareholder for Expenses Incurred**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on shareholder proposals to reimburse proxy solicitation expenses. When supporting the dissidents, vote FOR the reimbursement of the proxy solicitation expenses.

#### **Terminate the Investment Advisor**

Vote CASE-BY-CASE on proposals to terminate the investment advisor, considering the following factors:

- Performance of the fund's Net Asset Value (NAV)
- The fund's history of shareholder relations
- The performance of other funds under the advisor's management

**Scope**

This policy applies to Victory Capital Management Inc. The entity and its employees are responsible for complying with this policy. The Legal, Compliance and Risk Department owns this policy.

**Exception / Escalation Policy**

All material exceptions to this policy will be reported to the Compliance Committee and Victory Capital Management Inc. board members. If needed, exceptions may also be presented to the Victory Capital Holdings Inc. board members.

*Last Updated: February 1, 2019*

*Effective Date: February 1, 2020*