UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA

CASE NO.

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION,)
Plaintiff,)
v.)
MICHAEL J. MCNERNEY,)
Defendant.)

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff Securities and Exchange Commission alleges as follows:

I. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

1. The Commission brings this action to restrain and enjoin Defendant Michael J. McNerney, the former attorney for Mutual Benefits Corporation, from violating the federal securities laws. This action arises from the massive offering fraud MBC and its principals conducted that bilked at least \$1 billion from more than 30,000 investors worldwide. From late 1994 through the date of the Commission's emergency action against MBC in May 2004, the Company offered unregistered securities in the form of fractional interests in discounted life insurance policies known as viatical settlements.

2. In connection with the sale of these securities, MBC and its principals made numerous misrepresentations and omissions to investors about, among other things, the profitability and rates of maturity of the policies, the process by which life expectancies on the policies were determined, the use of investor proceeds, and the disciplinary histories of MBC's undisclosed principals. Additionally, MBC and its principals diverted and misused significant investor funds.

3. McNerney was a substantial participant in the MBC offering fraud. From 1995 through May 2004, he served as primary securities regulatory counsel for MBC. McNerney was aware of MBC's misuse of investor funds, helped conceal the fraud, met with investors, and supervised the filing of false reports with state regulators.

4. By virtue of his conduct, McNerney aided and abetted MBC's violations of Section 10(b) and Rule 10b-5 of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 ("Exchange Act"), 15 U.S.C. § 78j(b) and 17 C.F.R. § 240.10b-5.

II. JURISDICTION AND VENUE

5. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to Sections 21(d), 21(e), and 27 of the Exchange Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 78u(d), 78u(e) and 78aa.

6. Venue is proper in the Southern District of Florida because many of McNerney's acts and transactions giving rise to the violations alleged in this Complaint occurred in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. At all times relevant to the allegations in this Complaint, MBC's principal place of business and McNerney's primary residence were both located in Ft. Lauderdale.

7. In connection with the conduct alleged in this Complaint, McNerney, directly or indirectly, singly or in concert with others, made use of the means or instrumentalities of interstate commerce, the means and instruments of transportation and communication in interstate commerce, and the mails.

III. <u>DEFENDANT</u>

8. McNerney, 63, is currently incarcerated in Miami, Florida. At all times relevant to this Complaint, he was an attorney licensed to practice law in Florida. On August 26, 2011, a

judgment of conviction was entered against McNerney in *United States v. McNerney*, No. 08-CR-21158-CR-JORDAN, in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, finding him guilty of one count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 371, in connection with the MBC offering fraud. The Court sentenced McNerney to five years in prison and ordered him to pay restitution, jointly and severally with his coconspirators, in the amount of \$826,839,642.

IV. THE FRAUDULENT OFFERING

A. Mutual Benefit's Fraudulent Offering

9. From late 1994 until May 2004, MBC operated in Fort Lauderdale as a viatical and life settlement provider, raising money from investors to purchase viatical and life settlement contracts. A viatical or life settlement contract involves the sale of a life insurance policy by a terminally ill person or senior citizen (known within the industry as a "viator") at a price discounted from the face value of the policy. Investors pay the premiums, and receive the face value of the life insurance policy when the insured, or viator, dies. In turn, the viator receives a portion of the proceeds of his life insurance policy as a lump sum.

10. MBC was run primarily by its undisclosed principals, Joel Steinger, a convicted felon with an extensive disciplinary history, and his brother, Leslie Steinger, who also has a significant disciplinary history. Peter Lombardi was the president of MBC and Steven Steiner, who is the brother of Joel and Leslie Steinger, was the vice president.

11. MBC promised investors guaranteed, fixed rates of return ranging from 12% to 72%, depending upon the term of investment the investor chose. The life expectancy of the viator, as determined by MBC, determined the total rate of return.

12. MBC offered and sold its securities primarily through a national network of sales agents, consisting mainly of insurance agents, brokers, and financial advisors. MBC's sales agents solicited potential investors through newspaper advertisements, direct mailings, and sales seminars. MBC also solicited investors directly through its Internet website.

13. MBC provided its sales agents with offering materials, which in turn, the agents gave to investors. The offering materials included informational brochures in which MBC boasted it was a viatical industry leader and stated investors would receive "double digit" returns based on a low-risk investment. MBC's website echoed much of the information contained in the written materials.

14. MBC pooled investor money in an interest-bearing escrow account until such time as it acquired and matched an insurance policy to the investor. Once MBC placed investor funds on a policy, in most cases, the policy was fractionalized to accommodate investments by multiple investors.

15. MBC also distributed investor funds to various MBC-affiliated entities that had post-closing obligations, including Viatical Services, Inc., and a trustee MBC appointed to administer the funds in its various premium escrow accounts. Through VSI, MBC monitored the health of viators and tracked insurance premium obligations. When an insurance premium obligation became due, VSI issued payment instructions to the trustee who, in turn, issued a check to pay the insurance premium. While MBC sought to create the appearance VSI was an independent entity, MBC and Joel Steinger, in fact, controlled it. Steinger hired the president of VSI, who reported directly to Steinger. Steinger made the ultimate business decisions for VSI and MBC maintained VSI's books and records.

16. MBC used a significant portion of investor funds to pay commissions to sales agents and, unbeknownst to investors, to various shell companies Joel and Leslie Steinger and others controlled.

17. Between 1994 and May 2004, MBC raised more than \$1 billion from at least 30,000 investors worldwide through the unregistered offer and sale of securities in the form of fractionalized interests in viatical and life settlement contracts.

18. MBC did not file a registration statement with the Commission in connection with the securities it offered.

19. On May 3, 2004, the Commission filed a civil injunctive action against Mutual Benefits, Joel and Leslie Steinger, Peter Lombardi, and certain relief defendants, alleging violations of the antifraud and registration provisions of the federal securities laws. *SEC v. Mutual Benefits Corp.*, Case No. 04-60573-CIV-MORENO (the "MBC action"). On June 21, 2005, the Commission filed an Amended Complaint adding Steven Steiner as a defendant. On May 4, 2004, the Commission obtained emergency relief against all defendants, including appointment of a receiver over MBC, VSI, and other affiliated corporate entities, asset freezes against the defendants, and a temporary restraining order.

20. In May 2005, the Eleventh Circuit affirmed the District Court's order denying the defendants' motion to dismiss for lack of subject matter jurisdiction, ruling the viatical settlements MBC sold constituted securities under the federal securities laws. *SEC v. Mutual Benefits Corp.*, 408 F.3d 737 (11th Cir. 2005). All of the individual defendants in the MBC action have settled by consenting to entry of final judgments providing for full injunctive relief and ordering them to pay collectively more than \$28 million in disgorgement and civil penalties.

B. MBC'S Misrepresentations and Omissions to Investors

21. In connection with the offer and sale of MBC's securities, MBC and its principals made numerous material misrepresentations to investors and failed to disclose material information about, among other things, the viators' life expectancies, insurance premium escrow deficiencies, "guaranteed" fixed rates of return, the Steingers' backgrounds, payments to the Steingers, and the safety and security of the investments. Additionally, MBC and its principals diverted and misused significant investor funds.

22. MBC falsely claimed independent physicians determined the life expectancies assigned to each policy. While MBC engaged several licensed physicians to provide life expectancies for viators, it was Joel Steinger who actually determined most of these life expectancies. Contrary to representations to investors, many of the doctors MBC engaged never reviewed the viators' medical records to confirm their diagnosis or establish an independent estimated life expectancy. Instead, they merely issued fraudulent life expectancy letters or affidavits MBC's employees drafted that contained life expectancy figures Joel Steinger had already designated.

23. MBC also falsely represented to investors that 90% of their policies matured before or at the assigned time of maturity. However, because of the fraudulent life expectancies MBC assigned, most of the life insurance policies failed to mature within the designated time period and, by the time the Commission filed its emergency action in May 2004, more than 90% of MBC's active policies had substantially surpassed the assigned life expectancies.

24. MBC failed to disclose to investors the existence of serious cash deficiencies in the escrow accounts where the Company set aside investor funds to pay future premiums on the life insurance policies. Because of the fraudulent life expectancies MBC assigned and because

MBC failed to set aside any funds for hundreds of policies, the escrow accounts suffered serious shortfalls. As of September 30, 2003, more than 74% of MBC's active policies had zero or negative escrow balances.

25. Additionally, MBC's representations to investors regarding its rates of returns were false and misleading. Because of the serious problems with the life expectancies assigned to some of MBC's policies and the deficiencies in the Company's premium escrow account, investors were frequently faced with the prospect of having to place additional funds with MBC in order to cover future premium payments, which resulted in a reduction of the returns promised to them.

26. At the same time MBC was encountering these cash deficiencies, its principals were wrongfully diverting millions of dollars to themselves in undisclosed "consulting fees" and wire transfers to offshore accounts.

27. Finally, MBC failed to disclose Joel and Leslie Steinger played substantial roles in the operation of MBC and VSI and were, in fact, undisclosed principals of these entities. As such, MBC should have disclosed their criminal and disciplinary backgrounds to investors. However, MBC failed to make such disclosures. MBC also failed to disclose to investors that at least five states had issued cease-and-desist orders against MBC and its principals for securities fraud and registration violations, and a sixth state had issued a cease-and-desist order against the sales agents who sold the investment in that state.

C. McNerney's Role in MBC'S Fraudulent Offering

28. MBC retained McNerney and his law firm, Brinkley, McNerney, Solomon and Tatum, LLP ("Brinkley McNerney") to represent it. Since no later than 1995, McNerney and his

firm served as primary counsel for MBC and represented the Company in a variety of matters before regulatory agencies as well as in civil lawsuits.

29. As MBC's primary counsel, McNerney supervised, directed, and assisted attorneys who drafted legal documents, registration materials, and disclosure statements filed with numerous state insurance regulators on behalf of MBC.

30. McNerney approved and directed MBC's filings with state insurance regulators. These filings were critical to MBC's operation as a viatical settlement provider. MBC could not have operated as a viatical settlement provider in the State of Florida without filing its initial application for approval, obtaining that approval, and remaining in good standing by making annual filings and responding to regular requests for additional information from the state.

31. MBC's filings with state regulators provided information to the public about the nature of MBC'S business, operations, and principals. Its annual filings with the state required the Company to update its information about litigation and any change of control within the Company. MBC's filings with various state insurance regulators were publicly available to investors.

32. MBC's filings with state regulators made material misrepresentations and omissions about, among other things, its business operations, its success as a viatical service provider, and the identity of its principals and their disciplinary and criminal histories. McNerney knew Joel and Leslie Steinger substantially controlled all of the Company's operations. However, from 1995 through 2004, McNerney approved and directed the filing of false and misleading information with state regulators to conceal the fact that Joel Steinger, a convicted felon with a disciplinary history, was a controlling principal of MBC.

33. Additionally, McNerney assisted others in the execution of certain escrow duties on behalf of MBC investors concerning the assignment of insurance policy benefits and authorizing the disbursement of investor funds.

34. Throughout the relevant time period, McNerney was aware of MBC's use of new investor funds to pay premiums on older insurance policies.

35. Additionally, McNerney met with prospective investors as part of MBC's sales efforts, and failed to disclose information concerning MBC's false regulatory filings and false life expectancy determinations.

36. McNerney also failed to disclose to investors Joel Steinger's felony conviction, and the fraudulent conduct of a physician who reviewed life expectancy information.

37. McNerney also participated in the fraudulent purchase and assignment of group policies on behalf of MBC. McNerney directed an attorney employed by his firm to fraudulently acquire group insurance policies by creating false documentation which made it appear group policies were being assigned as gifts to individuals. In truth, MBC was surreptitiously purchasing the policies, despite restrictions within the policies prohibiting their sale.

V. VIOLATIONS

Aiding and Abetting MBC's Violations of Section 10(b) and Rule 10b-5 of the Exchange Act

38. The Commission repeats and realleges paragraphs 1 through 37 of its Complaint.

39. From at least 1995 through May 2004, MBC, directly and indirectly, by use of the means and instrumentalities of interstate commerce, and of the mails in connection with the purchase or sale of the securities, as described in this Complaint, knowingly or recklessly: (a) employed devices, schemes or artifices to defraud; (b) made untrue statements of material facts and omitted to state material facts necessary in order to make the statements made, in the light of

the circumstances under which they were made, not misleading; or (c) engaged in acts, practices and courses of business which have operated as a fraud upon the purchasers of such securities.

40. During the relevant time period, McNerney, knowingly or recklessly, substantially participated in MBC's violations of Section 10(b) and Rule 10b-5 of the Exchange Act.

41. By reason of the foregoing, McNerney, aided and abetted MBC's violations of Section 10(b) and Rule 10b-5 of the Exchange Act, 15 U.S.C. § 78j(b); 17 C.F.R. § 240.10b-5.

VI. <u>RELIEF REQUESTED</u>

WHEREFORE, the Commission respectfully requests that the Court:

I.

Declaratory Relief

Declare, determine and find that Defendant McNerney committed the violations of the federal securities laws alleged in this Complaint.

II.

Permanent Injunctive Relief

Issue a Permanent Injunction restraining and enjoining McNerney, his officers, agents, servants, employees, attorneys, and all persons in active concert or participation with them, and each of them, from aiding and abetting violations of Section 10(b) and Rule 10b-5 of the Exchange Act, as indicated above.

III.

Further Relief

Grant such other relief as this Court may deem just and appropriate.

IV.

Retention of Jurisdiction

Further, the Commission respectfully requests that the Court retain jurisdiction over this action in order to implement and carry out the terms of all orders and decrees that it may enter, or to entertain any suitable application or motion by the Commission for additional relief within the jurisdiction of this Court.

Respectfully submitted,

April 30, 2012

By:

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JS 44 (Rev. 09/11)

CIVIL COVER SHEET

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. *(SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)*

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION				DEFENDANTS MCNERNEY, MICHAEL J.			
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)				County of Residence of First Listed Defendant Miami-Dade (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY) NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED.			
(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, A Robert K. Levenson, Sec Avenue, Suite 1800, Mian	Address, and Telephone Number urities and Exchange (mi, FL 33131, 305-982	Commission, 801 E -6322	Brickell	Attomeys (If Known)			
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Image: U.S. Government Plaintiff Image: Constraint of the second secon				(For Diversity Cases Only) and One Box for Defendant) PTF DEF PTF DEF itizen of This State 1 1 25 I Incorporated or Principal Place 4 4 of Business In This State			
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IV. NATURE OF SUIT	(Place an "X" in One Box O	nly)					
GONTRACT		RTS.			BANKRUPTCY	OTHER STATUTES	
 110 Insurance 120 Marine 130 Miller Act 140 Negotiable Instrument 150 Recovery of Overpayment 	PERSONAL INJURY 310 Airplane 315 Airplane Product Liability 320 Assault, Libel &	Airplane 365 Personal Injury Airplane Product Product Liability Liability 367 Health Care/		25 Drug Related Seizure of Property 21 USC 881 90 Other	 422 Appeal 28 USC 158 423 Withdrawal 28 USC 157 PROPERTY RIGHTS 	 375 False Claims Act 400 State Reapportionment 410 Antitrust 430 Banks and Banking 450 Commerce 	
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245 Tort Product Liability 290 All Other Real Property	Accommodations 445 Amer. w/Disabilities - Employment 446 Amer. w/Disabilities - Other 448 Education	 535 Death Penalty 540 Mandamus & Ot 550 Civil Rights 555 Prison Condition 560 Civil Detainee - Conditions of Confinement 	□ 40	2 Naturalization Application 63 Habeas Corpus - Alien Detaince (Prisoner Petition) 65 Other Immigration Actions			
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VI. CAUSE OF ACTION	DN Brief description of ca	o); 17 C.F.R. § 240 use:	0.10b-5	(Do not cite jurisdictional sta			
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	CHECK IF THIS	ng Section 10(b) o IS A CLASS ACTION 23 Perm Inj	N D	EXAMPLE 2 Exchange EMAND S	Act of 1934 & Rule 10b CHECK YES only JURY DEMAND	y if demanded in complaint:	
VIII. RELATED CASI IF ANY	E(S) (See instructions):	JUDGE Hon. Fed	erico A.	Moreno		8 - cr - 21158 14-cv-60573	
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AO 440 (Rev. 12/09) Summons in a Civil Action

UNITED S	UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT					
	District of					
Plaintiff V.)))) Civil Action No.))					
Defendant)					

SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: (Defendant's name and address)

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 21 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you are the United States or a United States agency, or an officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are:

If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

CLERK OF COURT

Date:

Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk

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AO 440 (Rev. 12/09) Summons in a Civil Action (Page 2)

Civil Action No.

PROOF OF SERVICE

(This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (l))

	This summons for (nam	me of individual and title, i	f any)							
was re	ceived by me on (date)		·							
	□ I personally served	l the summons on the i	ndividual at (place)							
	on (<i>date</i>) ; or									
	 I left the summons at the individual's residence or usual place of abode with (name) , a person of suitable age and discretion who resides there, on (date), and mailed a copy to the individual's last known address; or 									
	□ I served the summons on (<i>name of individual</i>)									
	designated by law to accept service of process on behalf of (name of organization)									
				on (date)	; or					
	□ I returned the summons unexecuted because									
	Other (<i>specify</i>):									
						•				
	My fees are \$	for travel an	d \$	_ for services, for a	total of \$	·				
	I declare under penalty of perjury that this information is true.									
Date:										
			Server's signature							
		-		Printed name and	title					

Server's address

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc: