UNITED STATES OF AMERICA CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEEDING
File No. 2023-CFPB-0008

In the Matter of:

CONSENT ORDER

Freedom Mortgage Corporation

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (Bureau) has reviewed Freedom Mortgage Corporation's (Freedom or Respondent, as defined below) acts and practices for generating Traditional Retail mortgage business and has identified violations of Section 8(a) of the Real Estate Settlement Procedures Act's prohibition on giving things of value for referrals of business incident to or part of a settlement service involving federally related mortgage loans. 12 U.S.C. § 2607(a) (RESPA), and its implementing regulation, Regulation X, 12 C.F.R. part 1024.

Order). (CFPA), 12 U.S.C. §§ 5563, 5565, the Bureau issues this Consent Order (Consent Under §§ 1053 and 1055 of the Consumer Financial Protection Act of 2010

Jurisdiction

2607(d)(4). CFPA, 12 U.S.C. §§ 5563 and 5565, and RESPA Section 8, 12 U.S.C. § The Bureau has jurisdiction over this matter under §§ 1053 and 1055 of the

Stipulation

5 over Respondent and the subject matter of this action Respondent admits the facts necessary to establish the Bureau's jurisdiction denying any of the findings of fact or conclusions of law, except that has consented to the issuance of this Consent Order by the Bureau under §§ by reference and is accepted by the Bureau. By this Stipulation, Respondent Consent Order," dated August 15, 2023 (Stipulation), which is incorporated Respondent has executed a "Stipulation and Consent to the Issuance of a 1053 and 1055 of the CFPA, 12 U.S.C. §§ 5563, 5565, without admitting or

II.

Definitions

- $\dot{\omega}$ The following definitions apply to this Consent Order:
- "Board" means the President as of the Effective Date of this Order, any Respondent's Board of Directors future President, and any other current or future members of
- **b**. "Effective Date" means the date on which the Consent Order is entered on the administrative docket.
- ç. "President" means Respondent's sole owner and operator and any future capacity. owner or operator of Respondent who serves in a similar or equivalent
- <u>d</u> "Supervision Director" means the Assistant Director of the Office of their delegate Supervision Policy for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, or
- Ö "Related Consumer Action" means a private action by or on behalf of governmental agency brought against Respondent based on substantially one or more consumers or an enforcement action by another the same facts as described in Section IV of this Consent Order
- ť. "Relevant Period" includes from January 1, 2017 to the Effective Date.

- άð "Respondent" means Freedom Mortgage Corporation and its successors
- h. "Traditional Retail" means the mortgage origination market segment directly from real estate brokers and agents where loan officers attempt to obtain mortgage origination business
- <u>..</u>. or about August 2021 until on or about August 2022. or about August 2021, and conducted through Freedom's former "Traditional Retail Unit" means Freedom's business unit focused on the subsidiary RoundPoint Mortgage Servicing, Inc. (RoundPoint) from on Mortgage Corporation from the beginning of the Relevant Period until on Traditional Retail mortgage market, which was part of Freedom

V.

Bureau Findings and Conclusions

The Bureau finds the following:

- 4. servicer headquartered in Boca Raton, Florida Respondent is a privately held residential mortgage loan originator and
- 5 person" as that term is defined by 12 U.S.C. § 5481(6). CFPA. 12 U.S.C. § 5481(15)(A)(i). Respondent is therefore a "covered Mortgage origination is a consumer financial product or service under the

- 6. as that term is defined by RESPA. 12 U.S.C. § 2602(3) & 12 C.F.R. The origination of a federally related mortgage loan is a "settlement service"
- .7 are "federally related mortgage loans" as that term is defined by RESPA. 12 The majority of mortgages originated by Freedom's Traditional Retail Unit U.S.C. § 2602(1) & 12 C.F.R. § 1024.2(b).
- ∞ Traditional Retail Unit from Freedom to its RoundPoint subsidiary Relevant Period until August 2021, when Respondent transferred the Respondent maintained a Traditional Retail Unit from the beginning of the
- 9. Retail Unit in August 2022, and Respondent no longer has a Traditional Retail Unit Respondent's RoundPoint subsidiary ceased operations in the Traditional

giving subscription services in exchange for mortgage referrals Findings and Conclusions as to Respondent

10. one of the subscription servicesservices were a thing of value that Freedom gave to the real estate agents referrals to Freedom's Traditional Retail loan officers. The subscription who accepted free access to these subscription services made mortgage real estate agents and brokers. Many of the real estate agents and brokers Freedom paid for several subscription services and then gave free access to brokers. For example, Freedom paid thousands of dollars per month for -which provided information concerning

real estate agents accepted subscriptions through Freedom's account property reports, sales comparables, and foreclosure data--and over 2,000

11. relationships, in violation of RESPA Section 8(a). See 12 C.F.R. § subscription services to create, maintain, and strengthen mortgage referral part of a pattern, practice, or course of conduct of giving free access to referrals to Freedom's Traditional Retail Unit during the Relevant Period, as both Realty Connect and other brokerages) made more than 1,000 mortgage who received free access to these subscription services (including agents at would give them access to its subscription services. The real estate agents paired with a Freedom Traditional Retail Unit loan officer before Freedom Freedom sometimes required real estate agents and brokers to agree to be 1024.14(e)

hosting and subsidizing events in exchange for mortgage referrals Findings and Conclusions as to Respondent

- 12. agents' entertainment paid for by Freedom many of these events, Freedom would pay for the real estate brokers and hosted and subsidized events for certain real estate brokers and agents. For From at least July 1, 2017 to 2022, Freedom's Traditional Retail Unit also food, beverages, and alcohol. Some of the events also included
- 13. sporting events, charity galas, or other events where the real estate agents Freedom's Traditional Retail Unit would also sometimes give free tickets to

- and brokers would have otherwise needed to pay for their own admission, food, and alcohol.
- 14. Freedom several thousand dollars or more agents and brokers who attended the events. The events frequently cost These events were a thing of value that Freedom gave to the real estate
- 15. brokerages that didn't refer mortgage business to Freedom's loan officers Freedom targeted these events at new or existing mortgage referral sources Freedom also denied requests for event sponsorship from real estate
- 16. violation of RESPA Section 8(a). See 12 C.F.R. value to create, maintain, and strengthen mortgage referral relationships, in agents as part of a pattern, practice, or course of conduct of giving things of Freedom hosted or subsidized the events for real estate brokerages and § 1024.14(e).

Findings and Conclusions as to Respondent using MSAs to pay for mortgage referrals

17. was approximately \$90,000 per month The total amount Freedom paid under its MSAs during the Relevant Period payments ranged from a few hundred to several thousand dollars per month. Freedom made a monthly payment to each respective brokerage. The Freedom's Traditional Retail Unit also had marketing services agreements (MSAs) in place with more than 40 real estate brokerages. Under the MSAs,

- 18. real estate brokerages for marketing to consumers another mechanism to pay for mortgage referrals, rather than compensate Freedom's Traditional Retail Unit structured and implemented the MSAs as brokerage counterparties to perform certain marketing services for Freedom. In return for the monthly payment, the agreements called for the real estate
- 19. home buying public mail marketing campaigns" directed at the broker's agents, in addition to the brokerage to "conduct E-mail marketing campaigns" and "conduct direct broker's own agents. For example, certain agreements required the the MSAs also required the real estate broker to promote Freedom to the supposed to perform under the MSA were directed to consumers, some of While some of the marketing services that the real estate brokers
- 20. referrals that had been made when tracking performance under the MSAs Freedom's Traditional Retail Unit sometimes documented the number of
- 21. the client could directly contact the Freedom loan officer for assistance officer's headshot and Freedom logo at the top, and included buttons where clients. The app, as shared with the clients, featured the Freedom loan the MSA brokerage's agents. The agents would then share the app with their app, which Freedom's Traditional Retail Unit loan officers would share with Freedom also encouraged its MSA partners to use a third-party smartphone

- 22. brokerages that received monthly payments through an MSA events that were hosted or subsidized by Freedom also worked at real estate Many of the real estate agents who received free subscriptions and attended
- 23. materials also had a print shop that created the hard copies of co-branded marketing marketing copy, such as co-branded mailers or open house flyers. Freedom maintained a professional design team and licensed software to create marketing services covered under the MSAs. For example, Freedom consumers under the MSAs, Freedom performed most of the actual Although Freedom did some joint marketing with real estate brokers to
- 24. brokers as part of a pattern, practice, or course of conduct to create performed or provided. Freedom gave the MSA payments to real estate market value of any marketing services the brokerages may have actually and that the brokerages accepted bore no reasonable relationship to the net they actually performed. Freedom's payments that it gave to the brokerages referrals, rather than compensate the brokerages for any marketing services through MSAs were both structured and implemented to generate mortgage As explained above, Freedom's payments made to the real estate brokerages RESPA Section 8(a). 12 U.S.C. § 2607(a) & 12 C.F.R. § 1024.14(e). maintain, and strengthen mortgage referral relationships in violation of

Findings and Conclusions as to Respondent's Violations of CFPA Section 1036

- 25. 8(a), 12, U.S.C. § 2607(a) and Regulation X, 12 C.F.R. § 1024.14(b), (e). business for federally related mortgage loans, in violation of RESPA Section agreement or understanding to receive referrals of mortgage origination subscription services, and meals, beverages, and entertainment—under an Respondent, as explained above in ¶¶ 10-24, gave numerous things of value to real estate brokers and agents—including monthly MSA payments
- 26. consumer financial law. 12 U.S.C. §§ 5481(12)(M), (14). Therefore A violation of a Federal consumer financial law is a violation of Section Respondent violated Section 1036 of the CFPA 1036 of the CFPA. 12 U.S.C. § 5536(a)(1)(A). RESPA is a Federal

CONDUCT PROVISIONS

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Prohibited Conduct

IT IS ORDERED, under §§ 1053 and 1055 of the CFPA, that:

27. connection with any Traditional Retail business, must not violate Section 8 actual notice of this Consent Order, whether acting directly or indirectly, in all other persons in active concert or participation with them who receive Respondent and its officers, agents, servants, employees, and attorneys, and

of RESPA, 12 U.S.C. C.F.R. § 1024.14, and are prohibited from: § 2607, or its implementing regulation, Regulation X,

- a. Respondent for real estate settlement services; other thing of value, in exchange for referring any person to subscription services, food, drink, or entertainment, or giving any providing or paying for, or agreeing to provide or pay for
- **b**. business to any person; and marketing Respondent's real estate settlement services-related not bear a reasonable relationship to the market value of the goods, accepting, making, or agreeing to accept or make payments that do facilities, or services actually provided under an MSA that involves
- 0 federally related mortgage loan shall be referred to any person. incident to or part of a real estate settlement service involving a any agreement or understanding, oral or otherwise, that business giving or accepting any fee, kickback, or thing of value pursuant to

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Compliance Plan

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that:

28. Retail operations, Respondent must, at least 30 days before resuming In the event Respondent intends to resume, create, or acquire Traditional

Compliance Plan must include, at a minimum: financial laws, and the terms of this Consent Order (Compliance Plan). The applicable laws that the Bureau enforces, including Federal consumer Respondent's Traditional Retail policies and procedures comply with all and non-objection, a comprehensive compliance plan designed to ensure that Traditional Retail operations, submit to the Supervision Director, for review

- a. Order; detailed steps for addressing each action required by this Consent
- **b**. compliance actions; and a mechanism to ensure that the Board is kept apprised of the status of
- <u>.</u> specific timeframes and deadlines for implementation of the steps described above

VII.

The Board's Role

- 29. Respondent's Board has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that Respondent complies with this Consent Order
- 30. and any submissions to the Bureau prior to such submission. The Board must review all plans and reports required by this Consent Order,

- 31. which, at a minimum which is sworn to under penalty of perjury by Respondent's Board and (Compliance Report) that has been approved by the Board, the accuracy of Supervision Director an accurate written compliance progress report One year after the Effective Date, Respondent must submit to the
- a. applicable; paragraph and subparagraph of the Order and the Compliance Plan, if assess whether Respondent is complying with each applicable Describes the steps that Respondent's Board have taken to reasonably
- **b**. or subparagraph; and potential non-compliance with the applicable requirement, paragraph, of such compliance and any corrective actions taken to remedy each applicable paragraph and subparagraph of the Order and Compliance Plan, if applicable, including the manner of verification Describes in detail whether and how Respondent has complied with
- <u>.</u> attaches a copy of each Order Acknowledgment obtained under Section X, unless previously submitted to the Bureau.
- 32. Respondent's Board must:
- a. whether Respondent is complying with each applicable paragraph and Authorize whatever actions are necessary for Respondent to assess

- applicable subparagraph of the Consent Order and with the Compliance Plan, if
- **b**. applicable: paragraph and subparagraph of the Order and the Compliance Plan, if necessary for Respondent to fully comply with each applicable Authorize whatever actions, including corrective actions, are
- ç. compliance obligations; and Require timely reporting by management to the Board on the status of
- \dot{q} material non-compliance with the directives related to this Section. Require timely and appropriate corrective action to remedy any

MONETARY PROVISIONS

VIII.

Order to Pay Civil Money Penalty

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that:

33. must pay a civil money penalty of \$1.75 million to the Bureau. violations of law described in Section IV of this Consent Order, Respondent Under § 1055(c) of the CFPA, 12 U.S.C. § 5565(c), by reason of the

- 34. compliance with the Bureau's wiring instructions penalty by wire transfer to the Bureau or to the Bureau's agent in Within 10 days of the Effective Date, Respondent must pay the civil money
- 35. the Civil Penalty Fund of the Bureau as required by § 1017(d) of the CFPA. The civil money penalty paid under this Consent Order will be deposited in 12 U.S.C. § 5497(d).
- 36. the Bureau ultimately uses those funds, Respondent may not: this Consent Order as a penalty paid to the government. Regardless of how Respondent, for all purposes, must treat the civil money penalty paid under
- a. benefit for any civil money penalty paid under this Consent Order; or Claim, assert, or apply for a tax deduction, tax credit, or any other tax
- **b**. made under any insurance policy, with regard to any civil money penalty paid under this Consent Order indemnification from any source, including but not limited to payment Seek or accept, directly or indirectly, reimbursement or
- 37. civil money penalty paid in this action or because of any payment that the monetary remedies imposed in the Related Consumer Action because of the nor may Respondent benefit by, any offset or reduction of any compensatory Consumer Action, Respondent may not argue that Respondent is entitled to, To preserve the deterrent effect of the civil money penalty in any Related

amount of the civil money penalty imposed in this action not be considered an additional civil money penalty and will not change the amount of the offset or reduction to the U.S. Treasury. Such a payment will from the Civil Penalty Fund, Respondent must, within 30 days after entry of penalty paid in this action or based on any payment that the Bureau makes monetary remedies imposed against Respondent based on the civil money Consumer Action offsets or otherwise reduces the amount of compensatory Bureau makes from the Civil Penalty Fund. If the court in any Related final order granting such offset or reduction, notify the Bureau, and pay the

- 38. payable. default to the date of payment, and will immediately become due and amended, will accrue on any outstanding amounts not paid from the date of under this Consent Order, interest, computed under 28 U.S.C. § 1961, as In the event of any default on Respondent's obligations to make payment
- 39. returned to Respondent Respondent must relinquish all dominion, control, and title to the funds paid to the fullest extent permitted by law and no part of the funds may be
- 40. Under 31 U.S.C. § 7701, Respondent, unless it already has done so, must furnish to the Bureau its taxpayer-identification numbers, which may be

arising out of this Consent Order used for purposes of collecting and reporting on any delinquent amount

41. consumers to whom that redress has been or will be paid or is required to pay to consumers and describe the consumers or classes of notification must indicate the amount of redress, if any, that Respondent paid in a Related Consumer Action, Respondent must notify the Regional Director of the final judgment, consent order, or settlement in writing. That Within 30 days of the entry of a final judgment, consent order, or settlement

COMPLIANCE PROVISIONS

X.

Reporting Requirements

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that:

42. proceeding by or against Respondent; or a change in Respondent's name or subject to this Consent Order; the filing of any bankruptcy or insolvency of a subsidiary, parent, or affiliate that engages in any acts or practices result in the emergence of a successor company; the creation or dissolution compliance obligations arising under this Consent Order, including but not limited to a dissolution, assignment, sale, merger, or other action that would Respondent must notify the Bureau of any development that may affect

development before the development, but in any case no later than 14 days after the address. Respondent must provide this notice, if practicable, at least 30 days

- 43. Within 7 days of the Effective Date, Respondent must:
- a. postal addresses as points of contact that the Bureau may use to communicate with Respondent; Designate at least one telephone number and email, physical, and
- **b**. addresses; and telephone numbers, and physical, postal, email, and Internet that Respondent directly or indirectly controls, by all of their names, Identify all businesses for which Respondent is the majority owner, or
- <u>.</u> and services offered, and the means of advertising, marketing, and Describe the activities of each such business, including the products
- 44. as practicable after learning about the change, whichever is sooner submitted under Paragraph 43 at least 30 days before the change or as soon Respondent must report any change in the information required to be

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Order Distribution and Acknowledgment

- 45. sworn under penalty of perjury. Regional Director an acknowledgment of receipt of this Consent Order, Within 7 days of the Effective Date, Respondent must submit to the
- 46. responsibilities related to the subject matter of the Consent Order service providers, or other agents and representatives who have Board, as well as to any vice presidents, managers, loan officers, employees, Consent Order to each of its executive officers and each member of the Within 30 days of the Effective Date, Respondent must deliver a copy of this
- 47. assume their responsibilities responsibilities related to the subject matter of the Consent Order before they service providers, or other agents and representatives who will have Board, as well as to any vice presidents, managers, loan officers, employees, referred to in Section IX, any future executive officers and members of the Consent Order to any business entity resulting from any change in structure For 5 years from the Effective Date, Respondent must deliver a copy of this
- 48. comply with the requirements of the E-Sign Act, 15 U.S.C. § 7001 et seq., of a copy of this Consent Order, ensuring that any electronic signatures Respondent must secure a signed and dated statement acknowledging receipt

within 30 days of delivery, from all persons receiving a copy of this Consent Order under this Section.

49. acknowledging receipt of this Consent Order under Paragraph 48 delivered under the Section of this Order titled "Order Distribution and a list of all persons and their titles to whom this Consent Order has been Ninety days from the Effective Date, Respondent must submit to the Bureau Acknowledgment" and a copy of all signed and dated statements

XI.

Recordkeeping

- 50. with Traditional Retail: Respondent must create and retain the following business records associated
- a. with each provision of this Consent Order and, if applicable, the all documents and records necessary to demonstrate full compliance Compliance Plan, including all submissions to the Bureau
- **b**. course of business, for expenses and revenues directly associated with general ledger accounting records in the format used in the ordinary Traditional Retail mortgage origination;
- 0 all emails, instructions, and other documents related to any

subscription service paid for or subsidized in whole or in part by Respondent and given to a real estate settlement service provider;

- \mathfrak{c} of value given to a real estate settlement service provider; hosted by or paid in full or in part by Respondent and involving things all emails, instructions, and other documents related to any event
- 9 requests through a third party), and any responses to those complaints or Traditional Retail (whether received directly or indirectly, such as all consumer complaints and refund requests associated with
- f. mortgage origination services, that person's name, telephone number, service, and, if applicable, the reason for termination; and email, physical, and postal address, job title or position, dates of records showing, for each employee providing Traditional Retail
- brokers that partner with Respondent's wholesale channel), the name records showing, for each service provider providing Traditional if applicable, the reason for termination physical, and postal address, job title or position, dates of service, and, of a point of contact as well as that person's telephone number, email, Retail mortgage origination services (excluding independent mortgage

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- 51. access, retrieval, auditing and production are not hindered format. Data should be centralized, and maintained in such a way that All documents and records must be maintained in their original electronic
- 52. to the Bureau upon the Bureau's request. Respondent must make the documents identified in Paragraph 50 available

XII.

Notices

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that:

53. follows: the following email: Enforcement Compliance@cfpb.gov addressed as relating to this Consent Order in writing, with the subject line, provide all submissions, requests, communications, or other documents Unless otherwise directed in writing by the Bureau, Respondent must Freedom Mortgage Corp., File No. 2023-CFPB-0008," and send them to , "In re

ATTN: Supervision Director, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Office of Supervision Policy

XIII.

Compliance Monitoring

- 54. produce documents which must be made under penalty of perjury; provide sworn testimony; or must submit additional Compliance Reports or other requested information, Within 14 days of receipt of a written request from the Bureau, Respondent
- 55. Consent Order. The person interviewed may have counsel present with the conduct described in Section IV; or (c) compliance with the interview regarding: (a) this matter; (b) anything related to or associated or other person affiliated with Respondent who has agreed to such an Respondent must permit Bureau representatives to interview any employee
- 56. process investigative demands under 12 C.F.R. § 1080.6 or other compulsory Nothing in this Consent Order will limit the Bureau's lawful use of civil

XIV.

Modifications to Non-Material Requirements

- 57. requirements) by submitting a written request to the Supervision Director. Consent Order (e.g., reasonable extensions of time and changes to reporting Respondent may seek a modification to non-material requirements of this
- 58. requirements of this Consent Order (e.g., reasonable extensions of time and The Supervision Director may, in their discretion, modify any non-material

modification. Any such modification by the Supervision Director must be in changes to reporting requirements) if they determine good cause justifies the

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

XV.

- 59. other person or governmental agency from taking any action against provisions of this Consent Order do not bar, estop, or otherwise prevent any described in Paragraph 60, below. Further, for the avoidance of doubt, the the Bureau from taking any other action against Respondent, except as The provisions of this Consent Order do not bar, estop, or otherwise prevent Respondent
- 60. violations or the continuation of a pattern or practice of violations or to affiliates, including, without limitation, to establish a pattern or practice of this Consent Order in future enforcement actions against Respondent and its them as of the Effective Date. The Bureau may use the practices described in practices occurred before the Effective Date and the Bureau knows about practices described in Section IV of this Consent Order, to the extent such for law violations that the Bureau has or might have asserted based on the The Bureau releases and discharges Respondent from all potential liability

any right of the Bureau to determine and ensure compliance with the calculate the amount of any penalty. This release does not preclude or affect Consent Order, or to seek penalties for any violations of the Consent Order

- 61. binding the Bureau or the United States expressly does not form, and may not be construed to form, a contract Consent Order issued under § 1053 of the CFPA, 12 U.S.C. This Consent Order is intended to be, and will be construed as, a final ∞ 5563, and
- 62. provisions of this Consent Order have been amended, suspended, waived, or effective and enforceable until such time, except to the extent that any though the action had never been filed. The Consent Order will remain appealed or upheld on appeal, then the Consent Order will terminate as provision of the Consent Order, and the dismissal or ruling is either not the relevant adjudicative body rules that Respondent did not violate any initiated within 5 years of the Effective Date. If such action is dismissed or alleging any violation of the Consent Order by Respondent, if such action is This Consent Order will terminate on the later of 5 years from the Effective terminated in writing by the Bureau or its designated agent Date or 5 years from the most recent date that the Bureau initiates an action
- 63. on calendar days, unless otherwise noted Calculation of time limitations will run from the Effective Date and be based

- 64. applicable provisions of this Consent Order obtain the written agreement of the transferee or assignee to comply with all are subject to this Consent Order, Respondent must, as a condition of sale Should Respondent seek to transfer or assign all or part of its operations that
- 65. contest that court's personal jurisdiction over Respondent this Consent Order in federal district court, the Bureau may serve amount of civil money penalties allowed under §1055(c) of the CFPA, 12 any violation of this Consent Order, the Bureau may impose the maximum The provisions of this Consent Order will be enforceable by the Bureau. For Respondent wherever Respondent may be found and Respondent may not U.S.C. § 5565(c). In connection with any attempt by the Bureau to enforce
- 66. communications, discussions, or understandings accompanying Stipulation supersede any prior oral or writter Order and the accompanying Stipulation. This Consent Order and the representations, or warranties other than what is contained in this Consent agreement between the parties. The parties have made no promises This Consent Order and the accompanying Stipulation contain the complete
- 67. employees to violate any law, rule, or regulation construed as allowing Respondent, its Board, executives, officers, or Nothing in this Consent Order or the accompanying Stipulation may be

IT IS SO ORDERED, this 17th day of August, 2023.

Rohit Chopra

Director

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau