

118TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 4589

To amend the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 to provide for the registration of proxy advisory firms, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 12, 2023

Mr. STEIL introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services

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## A BILL

To amend the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 to provide for the registration of proxy advisory firms, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. REGISTRATION OF PROXY ADVISORY FIRMS.**

4 (a) AMENDMENT.—The Securities Exchange Act of  
5 1934 (15 U.S.C. 78a et seq.) is amended by inserting after  
6 section 15G the following new section:

7 **“SEC. 15H. REGISTRATION OF PROXY ADVISORY FIRMS.**

8 “(a) CONDUCT PROHIBITED.—It shall be unlawful  
9 for a proxy advisory firm to make use of the mails or any  
10 means or instrumentality of interstate commerce to pro-

1 vide proxy voting advice, research, analysis, ratings or rec-  
2 ommendations to any client, unless such proxy advisory  
3 firm is registered under this section.

4 “(b) REGISTRATION PROCEDURES.—

5 “(1) APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION.—

6 “(A) IN GENERAL.—A proxy advisory firm  
7 shall file with the Commission an application  
8 for registration, in such form as the Commis-  
9 sion shall require, by rule, and containing the  
10 information described in subparagraph (B).

11 “(B) REQUIRED INFORMATION.—An appli-  
12 cation for registration under this section shall  
13 contain—

14 “(i) a certification that the applicant  
15 is able to consistently provide proxy advice  
16 based on accurate information;

17 “(ii) with respect to clients of the ap-  
18 plicant that vote shares held on behalf of  
19 shareholders, a certification that the appli-  
20 cant—

21 “(I) will provide proxy voting ad-  
22 vice only in the best economic interest  
23 of those shareholders; and

24 “(II) has the requisite expertise  
25 to ensure that voting recommenda-

1                   tions are in the best economic interest  
2                   of those shareholders;

3                   “(iii) information on the procedures  
4                   and methodologies that the applicant uses  
5                   to ensure that proxy voting recommenda-  
6                   tions are in the best economic interest of  
7                   the ultimate shareholders;

8                   “(iv) information on the organiza-  
9                   tional structure of the applicant;

10                  “(v) an explanation of whether or not  
11                  the applicant has in effect a code of ethics,  
12                  and if not, the reasons therefor;

13                  “(vi) a description of any potential or  
14                  actual conflict of interest relating to the  
15                  provision of proxy advisory services, includ-  
16                  ing those arising out of or resulting from  
17                  the ownership structure of the applicant or  
18                  the provision of other services by the appli-  
19                  cant or any person associated with the ap-  
20                  plicant;

21                  “(vii) the policies and procedures in  
22                  place to publicly disclose and manage con-  
23                  flicts of interest under subsection (f);

24                  “(viii) information related to the pro-  
25                  fessional and academic qualifications of

1 staff tasked with providing proxy advisory  
2 services; and

3 “(ix) any other information and docu-  
4 ments concerning the applicant and any  
5 person associated with such applicant as  
6 the Commission, by rule, may prescribe as  
7 necessary or appropriate in the public in-  
8 terest or for the protection of investors.

9 “(2) REVIEW OF APPLICATION.—

10 “(A) INITIAL DETERMINATION.—Not later  
11 than 90 days after the date on which the appli-  
12 cation for registration is filed with the Commis-  
13 sion under paragraph (1) (or within such longer  
14 period as to which the applicant consents) the  
15 Commission shall—

16 “(i) by order, grant registration; or

17 “(ii) institute proceedings to deter-  
18 mine whether registration should be de-  
19 nied.

20 “(B) CONDUCT OF PROCEEDINGS.—

21 “(i) CONTENT.—Proceedings referred  
22 to in subparagraph (A)(ii) shall—

23 “(I) include notice of the grounds  
24 for denial under consideration and an  
25 opportunity for hearing; and

1                   “(II) be concluded not later than  
2                   120 days after the date on which the  
3                   application for registration is filed  
4                   with the Commission under paragraph  
5                   (1).

6                   “(ii) DETERMINATION.—At the con-  
7                   clusion of such proceedings, the Commis-  
8                   sion, by order, shall grant or deny such ap-  
9                   plication for registration.

10                   “(iii) EXTENSION AUTHORIZED.—The  
11                   Commission may extend the time for con-  
12                   clusion of such proceedings for not longer  
13                   than 90 days, if the Commission finds  
14                   good cause for such extension and pub-  
15                   lishes its reasons for so finding, or for such  
16                   longer period as to which the applicant  
17                   consents.

18                   “(C) GROUNDS FOR DECISION.—The Com-  
19                   mission shall grant registration under this sub-  
20                   section—

21                   “(i) if the Commission finds that the  
22                   requirements of this section are satisfied;  
23                   and

1 “(ii) unless the Commission finds (in  
2 which case the Commission shall deny such  
3 registration) that—

4 “(I) the applicant has failed to  
5 certify to the Commission’s satisfac-  
6 tion that it is able to consistently pro-  
7 vide proxy advice based on accurate  
8 information and to materially comply  
9 with the procedures and methodolo-  
10 gies disclosed under paragraph (1)(B)  
11 and with subsections (f) and (g); or

12 “(II) if the applicant were so reg-  
13 istered, its registration would be sub-  
14 ject to suspension or revocation under  
15 subsection (d).

16 “(3) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION.—

17 Subject to section 24, the Commission shall make  
18 the information and documents submitted to the  
19 Commission by a proxy advisory firm in its com-  
20 pleted application for registration, or in any amend-  
21 ment submitted under paragraph (1) or (2) of sub-  
22 section (e), publicly available on the Commission’s  
23 website, or through another comparable, readily ac-  
24 cessible means.

25 “(c) UPDATE OF REGISTRATION.—

1           “(1) UPDATE.—Each registered proxy advisory  
2 firm shall promptly amend and update its applica-  
3 tion for registration under this section if any infor-  
4 mation or document provided therein becomes mate-  
5 rially inaccurate, except that a registered proxy advi-  
6 sory firm is not required to amend the information  
7 required to be filed under subsection (b)(1)(B)(i) by  
8 filing information under this paragraph, but shall  
9 amend such information in the annual submission of  
10 the organization under paragraph (2) of this sub-  
11 section.

12           “(2) CERTIFICATION.—Not later than 90 cal-  
13 endar days after the end of each calendar year, each  
14 registered proxy advisory firm shall file with the  
15 Commission an amendment to its registration, in  
16 such form as the Commission, by rule, may prescribe  
17 as necessary or appropriate in the public interest or  
18 for the protection of investors—

19           “(A) certifying that the information and  
20 documents in the application for registration of  
21 such registered proxy advisory firm continue to  
22 be accurate in all material respects; and

23           “(B) listing any material change that oc-  
24 curred to such information or documents during  
25 the previous calendar year.

1       “(d) CENSURE, DENIAL, OR SUSPENSION OF REG-  
2       ISTRATION; NOTICE AND HEARING.—The Commission, by  
3       order, shall censure, place limitations on the activities,  
4       functions, or operations of, suspend for a period not ex-  
5       ceeding 12 months, or revoke the registration of any reg-  
6       istered proxy advisory firm if the Commission finds, on  
7       the record after notice and opportunity for hearing, that  
8       such censure, placing of limitations, suspension, or revoca-  
9       tion is necessary for the protection of investors and in the  
10      public interest and that such registered proxy advisory  
11      firm, or any person associated with such an organization,  
12      whether prior to or subsequent to becoming so associ-  
13      ated—

14               “(1) has committed or omitted any act, or is  
15      subject to an order or finding, enumerated in sub-  
16      paragraph (A), (D), (E), (H), or (G) of section  
17      15(b)(4), has been convicted of any offense specified  
18      in section 15(b)(4)(B), or is enjoined from any ac-  
19      tion, conduct, or practice specified in subparagraph  
20      (C) of section 15(b)(4), during the 10-year period  
21      preceding the date of commencement of the pro-  
22      ceedings under this subsection, or at any time there-  
23      after;

24               “(2) has been convicted during the 10-year pe-  
25      riod preceding the date on which an application for

1 registration is filed with the Commission under this  
2 section, or at any time thereafter, of—

3 “(A) any crime that is punishable by im-  
4 prisonment for 1 or more years, and that is not  
5 described in section 15(b)(4)(B); or

6 “(B) a substantially equivalent crime by a  
7 foreign court of competent jurisdiction;

8 “(3) is subject to any order of the Commission  
9 barring or suspending the right of the person to be  
10 associated with a registered proxy advisory firm;

11 “(4) fails to furnish the certifications required  
12 under subsections (b)(2)(C)(ii)(I) and (c)(2);

13 “(5) has engaged in one or more prohibited acts  
14 enumerated in paragraph (1);

15 “(6) fails to maintain adequate financial and  
16 managerial resources to consistently offer advisory  
17 services to clients that vote shares held on behalf of  
18 shareholders consistent with the best economic inter-  
19 est of those shareholders, including by failing to  
20 comply with subsection (f) or (g);

21 “(7) fails to maintain adequate expertise to en-  
22 sure that proxy advisory services for clients that vote  
23 shares held on behalf of shareholders are tied to the  
24 best economic interest of those shareholders; or

1           “(8) engages in a prohibited act enumerated in  
2 subsection (j).

3           “(e) TERMINATION OF REGISTRATION.—

4           “(1) VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL.—A registered  
5 proxy advisory firm may, upon such terms and con-  
6 ditions as the Commission may establish as nec-  
7 essary in the public interest or for the protection of  
8 investors, which terms and conditions shall include  
9 at a minimum that the registered proxy advisory  
10 firm will no longer conduct such activities as to  
11 bring it within the definition of proxy advisory firm  
12 in section 3(a)(81), withdraw from registration by  
13 filing a written notice of withdrawal to the Commis-  
14 sion.

15           “(2) COMMISSION AUTHORITY.—In addition to  
16 any other authority of the Commission under this  
17 title, if the Commission finds that a registered proxy  
18 advisory firm is no longer in existence or has ceased  
19 to do business as a proxy advisory firm, the Com-  
20 mission, by order, shall cancel the registration under  
21 this section of such registered proxy advisory firm.

22           “(f) MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST.—

23           “(1) ORGANIZATION POLICIES AND PROCE-  
24 DURES.—Each registered proxy advisory firm shall  
25 establish, maintain, and enforce written policies and

1 procedures reasonably designed, taking into consid-  
2 eration the nature of the business of such registered  
3 proxy advisory firm and associated persons, to pub-  
4 licly disclose and manage any conflicts of interest  
5 that arise or would reasonably be expected to arise  
6 from such business.

7 “(2) COMMISSION AUTHORITY.—The Commis-  
8 sion shall, within one year of enactment, issue final  
9 rules to prohibit, or require the management and  
10 public disclosure of, any conflicts of interest relating  
11 to the offering of proxy advisory services by a reg-  
12 istered proxy advisory firm, including, without limi-  
13 tation, conflicts of interest relating to—

14 “(A) the manner in which a registered  
15 proxy advisory firm is compensated by the cli-  
16 ent, any affiliate of the client, or any other per-  
17 son for providing proxy advisory services;

18 “(B) business relationships, ownership in-  
19 terests, or any other financial or personal inter-  
20 ests between a registered proxy advisory firm,  
21 or any person associated with such registered  
22 proxy advisory firm, and any client, or any af-  
23 filiate of such client;

24 “(C) the formulation of proxy voting poli-  
25 cies;

1           “(D) the execution, or assistance with the  
2           execution, of proxy votes if such votes are based  
3           upon recommendations made by the proxy advi-  
4           sory firm in which a person other than the  
5           issuer is a proponent; and

6           “(E) any other potential conflict of inter-  
7           est, as the Commission deems necessary or ap-  
8           propriate in the public interest or for the pro-  
9           tection of investors.

10          “(3) DISCLOSURE ON FACTORS INFLUENCING  
11          RECOMMENDATIONS.—Each registered proxy advi-  
12          sory firm shall annually disclose to the Commission  
13          and make publicly available the economic and other  
14          factors that a reasonable investor would expect to in-  
15          fluence the recommendations of such proxy advisory  
16          firm, including the ownership composition of such  
17          proxy advisory firm and any meetings with, or feed-  
18          back received from, outside entities.

19          “(g) RELIABILITY OF PROXY ADVISORY FIRM SERV-  
20          ICES.—

21          “(1) IN GENERAL.—Each registered proxy advi-  
22          sory firm shall—

23                 “(A) have staff and other resources suffi-  
24                 cient to produce proxy voting recommendations  
25                 that are based on accurate and current infor-

1           mation and designed for clients that vote shares  
2           held on behalf of shareholders to advance the  
3           best economic interest of those shareholders;

4           “(B) implement procedures that permit  
5           issuers that are the subject of proxy voting rec-  
6           ommendations—

7                   “(i) access in a reasonable time to  
8                   data and information used to make rec-  
9                   ommendations; and

10                   “(ii) a reasonable opportunity to pro-  
11                   vide meaningful comment and corrections  
12                   to such data and information, including  
13                   the opportunity to present (in person or  
14                   telephonically) details to the person re-  
15                   sponsible for developing such data and in-  
16                   formation prior to the publication of proxy  
17                   voting recommendations to clients;

18           “(C) employ an ombudsman to receive  
19           complaints about the accuracy of information  
20           used in making recommendations from the com-  
21           panies that are the subject of the proxy advi-  
22           sory firm’s voting recommendations and seek to  
23           resolve those complaints in a timely fashion and  
24           prior to the publication of proxy voting rec-  
25           ommendations to clients; and

1           “(D) if the ombudsman is unable to re-  
2 solve a complaint to a company’s satisfaction  
3 prior to the publication of proxy voting rec-  
4 ommendations to clients, include in the final re-  
5 port of the firm to clients—

6                   “(i) a statement detailing the com-  
7 pany’s complaints, if requested in writing  
8 by the company; and

9                   “(ii) a statement explaining why the  
10 proxy voting recommendation is in the best  
11 economic interest of shareholders.

12           “(2) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

13                   “(A) DATA AND INFORMATION USED TO  
14 MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS.—The term ‘data  
15 and information used to make voting rec-  
16 ommendations’—

17                           “(i) means the financial, operational,  
18 or descriptive data and information on an  
19 issuer used by proxy advisory firms and  
20 any contextual or substantive analysis im-  
21 pacting the recommendation; and

22                           “(ii) does not include the entirety of  
23 the proxy advisory firm’s final report to its  
24 clients.

1                   “(B) REASONABLE TIME.—The term ‘rea-  
2                   sonable time’—

3                   “(i) means not less than 1 week be-  
4                   fore the publication of proxy voting rec-  
5                   ommendations for clients; and

6                   “(ii) shall not otherwise interfere with  
7                   a proxy advisory firm’s ability to provide  
8                   its clients with timely access to accurate  
9                   proxy voting research, analysis, or rec-  
10                  ommendations.

11               “(h) PRIVATE RIGHT OF ACTION WITH RESPECT TO  
12 ILLEGAL RECOMMENDATIONS.—Any proxy advisory firm  
13 that endorses a proposal that is not supported by the  
14 issuer but is approved and subsequently found by a court  
15 of competent jurisdiction to violate State or Federal law  
16 shall be liable to the applicable issuer for the costs associ-  
17 ated with the approval of such proposal, including imple-  
18 mentation costs and any penalties incurred by the issuer.

19               “(i) DESIGNATION OF COMPLIANCE OFFICER.—Each  
20 registered proxy advisory firm shall designate an indi-  
21 vidual who reports directly to senior management as re-  
22 sponsible for administering the policies and procedures  
23 that are required to be established pursuant to subsections  
24 (f) and (g), and for ensuring compliance with the securi-  
25 ties laws and the rules and regulations thereunder, includ-

1 ing those promulgated by the Commission pursuant to this  
2 section.

3 “(j) PROHIBITED CONDUCT.—

4 “(1) PROHIBITED ACTS AND PRACTICES.—Not  
5 later than one year after the date of enactment of  
6 this section, the Commission shall issue final rules  
7 to prohibit any act or practice relating to the offer-  
8 ing of proxy advisory services by a registered proxy  
9 advisory firm that the Commission determines to be  
10 unfair, coercive, or abusive, including any act or  
11 practice relating to—

12 “(A) advisory or consulting services (of-  
13 fered directly or indirectly, including through  
14 an affiliate) related to corporate governance  
15 issues; or

16 “(B) modifying a voting recommendation  
17 or otherwise departing from its adopted system-  
18 atic procedures and methodologies in the provi-  
19 sion of proxy advisory services, based on wheth-  
20 er an issuer, or affiliate thereof, subscribes or  
21 will subscribe to other services or product of the  
22 registered proxy advisory firm or any person as-  
23 sociated with such organization.

24 “(2) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in  
25 paragraph (1), or in any rules or regulations adopt-

1 ed thereunder, may be construed to modify, impair,  
2 or supersede the operation of any of the antitrust  
3 laws (as defined in the first section of the Clayton  
4 Act, except that such term includes section 5 of the  
5 Federal Trade Commission Act, to the extent that  
6 such section 5 applies to unfair methods of competi-  
7 tion).

8 “(k) STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL CONDITION.—  
9 Each registered proxy advisory firm shall, on a confiden-  
10 tial basis, file with the Commission, at intervals deter-  
11 mined by the Commission, such financial statements, cer-  
12 tified (if required by the rules or regulations of the Com-  
13 mission) by an independent public auditor, and informa-  
14 tion concerning its financial condition, as the Commission,  
15 by rule, may prescribe as necessary or appropriate in the  
16 public interest or for the protection of investors.

17 “(l) ANNUAL REPORT.—

18 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Each registered proxy advi-  
19 sory firm shall, not later than 90 calendar days after  
20 the end of each fiscal year, file with the Commission  
21 and make publicly available an annual report in such  
22 form as the Commission, by rule, may prescribe as  
23 necessary or appropriate in the public interest or for  
24 the protection of investors.

1           “(2) CONTENTS.—Each annual report required  
2 under paragraph (1) shall include, at a minimum,  
3 disclosure by the registered proxy advisory firm of  
4 the following:

5           “(A) A list of shareholder proposals the  
6 staff of the registered proxy advisory firm re-  
7 viewed in the prior fiscal year.

8           “(B) A list of the recommendations made  
9 in the prior fiscal year.

10           “(C) The economic analysis conducted to  
11 determine that final recommendations provided  
12 in the prior fiscal year (other than rec-  
13 ommendations relating to an issuer-sponsored  
14 proposal or recommendations consistent with  
15 that of a board of directors composed of a ma-  
16 jority of independent directors) delivered to cli-  
17 ents that vote shares held on behalf of share-  
18 holders were in the best economic interest of  
19 those shareholders.

20           “(D) The staff who reviewed and made  
21 recommendations on such proposals in the prior  
22 fiscal year.

23           “(E) The qualifications of such staff to en-  
24 sure that each of the recommendations for cli-  
25 ents that vote shares held on behalf of share-

1 holders were tied to the best economic interest  
2 of those shareholders.

3 “(F) The recommendations made in the  
4 prior fiscal year where the proponent of such  
5 recommendation was a client of or received  
6 services from the proxy advisory firm.

7 “(G) A certification by the chief executive  
8 officer, chief financial officer, and the primary  
9 executive responsible for overseeing the compila-  
10 tion and dissemination of proxy voting advice  
11 that the final recommendations (other than rec-  
12 ommendations relating to an issuer-sponsored  
13 proposal or recommendations consistent with  
14 that of a board of directors composed of a ma-  
15 jority of independent directors) delivered to cli-  
16 ents that vote shares held on behalf of share-  
17 holders in the last fiscal year—

18 “(i) were based on internal controls  
19 and procedures that are designed to ensure  
20 accurate information and that such inter-  
21 nal controls and procedures are effective;

22 “(ii) do not violate applicable State or  
23 Federal law; and

24 “(iii) were based on the best economic  
25 interest of those shareholders.

1           “(H) The economic and other factors that  
2           a reasonable investor would expect to influence  
3           the recommendations of such proxy advisory  
4           firm, including the ownership composition of  
5           such proxy advisory firm.

6           “(m) TRANSPARENT POLICIES.—Each registered  
7 proxy advisory firm shall file with the Commission and  
8 make publicly available its methodology for the formula-  
9 tion of proxy voting policies and voting recommendations  
10 to clients that vote shares held on behalf of shareholders  
11 and how that methodology ensures that the firm’s voting  
12 recommendations are in the best economic interest of  
13 those shareholders.

14          “(n) RULES OF CONSTRUCTION.—Registration under  
15 and compliance with this section does not constitute a  
16 waiver of, or otherwise diminish, any right, privilege, or  
17 defense that a registered proxy advisory firm may other-  
18 wise have under any provision of State or Federal law,  
19 including any rule, regulation, or order thereunder.

20          “(o) REGULATIONS.—

21                 “(1) NEW PROVISIONS.—Such rules and regula-  
22 tions as are required by this section or are otherwise  
23 necessary to carry out this section, including the ap-  
24 plication form required under subsection (a)—

1           “(A) shall be issued by the Commission,  
2           not later than 180 days after the date of enact-  
3           ment of this section; and

4           “(B) shall become effective not later than  
5           1 year after the date of enactment of this sec-  
6           tion.

7           “(2) REVIEW OF EXISTING REGULATIONS.—Not  
8           later than 270 days after the date of enactment of  
9           this section, the Commission shall—

10           “(A) review its existing rules and regula-  
11           tions which affect the operations of proxy advi-  
12           sory firms; and

13           “(B) amend or revise such rules and regu-  
14           lations in accordance with the purposes of this  
15           section, and issue such guidance as the Com-  
16           mission may prescribe as necessary or appro-  
17           priate in the public interest or for the protec-  
18           tion of investors.

19           “(p) APPLICABILITY.—This section, other than sub-  
20           section (n), which shall apply on the date of enactment  
21           of this section, shall apply on the earlier of—

22           “(1) the date on which regulations are issued in  
23           final form under subsection (o)(1); or

24           “(2) 270 days after the date of enactment of  
25           this section.

1       “(q) BEST ECONOMIC INTEREST DEFINED.—In this  
2 section, the term ‘best economic interest’ means decisions  
3 that seek to maximize investment returns over a time hori-  
4 zon consistent with the investment objectives and risk  
5 management profile of the fund in which the shareholders  
6 are invested.”.

7       (b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 17(a)(1) of  
8 the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (15 U.S.C.  
9 78q(a)(1)) is amended by inserting “proxy advisory firm,”  
10 after “nationally recognized statistical rating organiza-  
11 tion,”.

12       (c) PROXY ADVISORY FIRM DEFINITIONS.—Section  
13 3(a) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (15 U.S.C.  
14 78c(a)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

15               “(82) PROXY ADVISORY FIRM.—The term  
16       ‘proxy advisory firm’—

17                       “(A) means any person who is primarily  
18       engaged in the business of providing proxy vot-  
19       ing advice, research, analysis, ratings, or rec-  
20       ommendations to clients, which conduct con-  
21       stitutes a solicitation within the meaning of sec-  
22       tion 14; and

23                       “(B) does not include any person that is  
24       exempt under law or regulation from the re-

1            requirements otherwise applicable to persons en-  
2            gaged in such a solicitation.

3            “(83) PERSON ASSOCIATED WITH A PROXY AD-  
4            VISORY FIRM.—With respect to a proxy advisory  
5            firm—

6                       “(A) a person is ‘associated’ with the  
7            proxy advisory firm if the person is—

8                                  “(i) a partner, officer, or director of  
9            the proxy advisory firm (or any person oc-  
10          cupying a similar status or performing  
11          similar functions);

12                                “(ii) a person directly or indirectly  
13          controlling, controlled by, or under com-  
14          mon control with the proxy advisory firm;

15                                “(iii) an employee of the proxy advi-  
16          sory firm; or

17                                “(iv) a person the Commission deter-  
18          mines by rule is controlled by the proxy  
19          advisory firm; and

20                     “(B) a person is not ‘associated’ with the  
21          proxy advisory firm if the person only performs  
22          clerical or ministerial functions with respect to  
23          a proxy advisory firm.”.

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