



NEW YORK STATE
DEPARTMENT *of*
FINANCIAL SERVICES

Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

Maria T. Vullo
Superintendent

April 27, 2018

Director Dean L. Cameron, Chair
Annuity Suitability (A) Working Group
c/o Jolie H. Matthews
Senior Health and Life Policy Counsel
National Association of Insurance Commissioners
Hall of the States Building, Suite 700
444 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001-1512

RE: Proposed Revisions to the Suitability in Annuity Transactions Model Regulation (#275)

Dear Chairman Cameron:

New York appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed amendments to the *Suitability in Annuity Transactions Model Regulation*. New York believes in strong consumer protection standards for the sale of annuity and life insurance products.

On December 27, 2017, New York proposed the First Amendment to 11 NYCRR 224 (Insurance Regulation 187), Suitability in Life Insurance and Annuity Transactions. New York has received a wide array of comments from insurers, producers and consumer representatives. Many of the comments expressed support for, or a willingness to work towards, a best interest standard for annuities *and* life insurance. In response to the comments received, New York has made changes to the proposed regulatory amendment pursuant to New York's administrative procedures law, and maintaining the important consumer protections for both annuities and life insurance products.

New York submits its attached First Amendment to Regulation 187 for consideration of the Annuity Suitability Working Group and strongly recommends its adoption as a model regulation. Doing so would provide annuity and life insurance consumers across the United States with strong protections and would demonstrate the leadership of the state-based system on issues of consumer protection. As members of the Annuity Suitability Working Group and the Life Insurance and Annuities (A) Committee, New York will continue to dialogue with other states to seek to implement a uniform national standard.

Sincerely,

Maria T. Vullo

**NEW YORK STATE
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCIAL SERVICES
PROPOSED
FIRST AMENDMENT TO 11 NYCRR 224
(INSURANCE REGULATION 187)**

SUITABILITY IN LIFE INSURANCE AND ANNUITY TRANSACTIONS

I, Maria T. Vullo, Superintendent of Financial Services, pursuant to the authority granted by Sections 202 and 302 of the Financial Services Law and Sections 301, 308, 309, 2103, 2104, 2110, 2123, 2208, 3209, 4224, 4226, 4525, and Article 24 of the Insurance Law, do hereby promulgate the following First Amendment to Part 224 of Title 11 of the Official Compilation of Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York (Insurance Regulation 187), to take effect March 1, 2019, and to read as follows:

Section 224.0 Purpose.

(a) Insurance Law article 24 permits the superintendent to regulate trade practices in the business of insurance to prevent acts or practices that are unfair or deceptive. The Insurance Law, including sections 2103, 2104, 2110, 2123 and 2208, establishes standards of conduct for insurance producers, including that producers must act in a competent and trustworthy manner. The Insurance Law, including section 4226, also establishes standards of conduct for insurers, including fraternal benefit societies.

(b) This Part clarifies the duties and obligations of insurers, including fraternal benefit societies, by requiring them to establish standards and procedures for recommendations to consumers with respect to policies delivered or issued for delivery in this state so that any transaction with respect to those policies is in the best interest of the consumer and appropriately addresses the insurance needs and financial objectives of the consumer at the time of the transaction. This Part also clarifies the nature and extent of supervisory controls that an insurer must maintain to achieve compliance with this Part.

(c) This Part further clarifies the duties and obligations of producers when making recommendations to consumers with respect to policies delivered or issued for delivery in this state to help ensure that a transaction is in the best interest of the consumer and appropriately addresses the insurance needs and financial objectives of the consumer at the time of the transaction.

§ 224.1 Applicability.

This Part shall apply to any transaction or recommendation with respect to a proposed or in-force policy.

§ 224.2 Exemptions.

Unless otherwise specifically included, this Part shall not apply to transactions involving:

(a) purchase of a policy where the application is solicited and received in response to a generalized offer by the insurer by mail or under other methods without producer involvement and where there is no recommendation made;

(b) a policy used to fund:

(1) an employee pension or welfare benefit plan that is covered by the Employment and Income Security Act (ERISA);

(2) a plan described by Internal Revenue Code sections 401(a), 401(k), 403(b), 408(k) or 408(p), as amended, if established or maintained by an employer;

(3) a government or church plan defined in Internal Revenue Code section 414, a government or church welfare benefit plan, or a deferred compensation plan of a state or local government or tax exempt organization under Internal Revenue Code section 457;

(4) a nonqualified deferred compensation arrangement established or maintained by an employer or plan sponsor;

(5) a settlement or assumption of liabilities associated with personal injury litigation or any dispute or claim resolution process; or

(6) terminating employee pension plans or to assume liability of certain segments of ongoing plans, such as for terminated vested participants, or existing accrued benefits for currently active participants;

(c) any corporate or bank owned policy authorized by Insurance Law section 3205(d) where all benefits under the policy are payable to the corporate or bank policy owner;

(d) any credit life insurance as defined in Part 185 of this Title (Insurance Regulation 27A) sold on a group basis and in compliance with Part 185 of this Title (Insurance Regulation 27A); or

(e) any life settlement contract as defined in and subject to Article 78 of the Insurance Law.

§ 224.3 Definitions.

For purposes of this Part:

(a) *Consumer* means the owner or prospective purchaser of a policy.

(b) *Insurer* means a life insurance company as defined in Insurance Law section 107(a)(28) or a fraternal benefit society as defined in Insurance Law section 4501(a).

(c) *Insurance producer* or *producer* means an insurance agent or insurance broker.

(d) *Policy* means a life insurance policy, annuity contract, or a certificate issued by a fraternal benefit society or under a group life insurance policy or group annuity contract.

(e) *Recommendation* means one or more statements or acts by a producer, or by an insurer where no producer is involved, to a consumer that:

(1) reasonably may be interpreted by a consumer to be advice and that results in a consumer entering into or refraining from entering into a transaction in accordance with that advice; or

(2) is intended by the producer, or an insurer where no producer is involved, to result in a consumer entering into or refraining from entering into a transaction. A recommendation does not include general factual information to the public, such as advertisements, marketing materials, general education information regarding insurance or other financial products and general administrative services to the consumer.

(f) *Replace or replacement* means a transaction subject to Part 51 of this Title (Insurance Regulation 60) and involving a policy.

(g) *Suitability information* means:

(1) For a policy solely providing term life insurance with no cash value, information that is reasonably appropriate to determine the suitability of a recommendation commensurate with the materiality of the transaction to a consumer's financial situation at the time of the recommendation and the complexity of the transaction recommended, including the following, as relevant to the consumer:

(i) age;

(ii) annual income;

(iii) financial situation and needs, including the financial resources used for the funding of the policy;

(iv) financial objectives;

(v) intended use of the policy, including any riders attached thereto;

(vi) financial time horizon, including the duration of existing liabilities and obligations;

(vii) existing assets, including investment and insurance holdings;

(viii) tolerance of non-guaranteed elements in the policy, including variability in premium, death benefit, or fees; and

(ix) any other information provided by the consumer which in the reasonable judgment of the producer, or the insurer where no producer is involved, is relevant to the suitability of the transaction.

(2) For any policy other than a policy solely providing term life insurance with no cash value, information that is reasonably appropriate to determine the suitability of a recommendation commensurate with the materiality of the transaction to a consumer's financial situation at the time of the recommendation and the complexity of the transaction recommended, including the following, as relevant to the consumer:

(i) age;

(ii) annual income;

- (iii) financial situation and needs, including the financial resources used for the funding of the policy;
- (iv) financial experience;
- (v) financial objectives;
- (vi) intended use of the policy, including any riders attached thereto;
- (vii) financial time horizon, including the duration of existing liabilities and obligations;
- (viii) existing assets, including investment and insurance holdings;
- (ix) liquidity needs;
- (x) liquid net worth;
- (xi) risk tolerance;
- (xii) tolerance of non-guaranteed elements in the policy, including variability in premium, cash value, death benefit, or fees;
- (xiii) tax status; and
- (xiv) any other information provided by the consumer which in the reasonable judgment of the producer, or the insurer where no producer is involved, is relevant to the suitability of the transaction.

(h) *Suitable* means in furtherance of a consumer's needs and objectives under the circumstances then prevailing, based upon the suitability information provided by the consumer and all products, services, and transactions available to the producer.

(i) *Transaction* means any sales transaction or in-force transaction.

(j) *Sales transaction* means the purchase or issuance of a policy, any replacement as defined by section 51.2(a) of Part 51 (Insurance Regulation 60), conversion, or any modification or election of a contractual provision with respect to an in-force policy that generates new sales compensation.

(k) *In-force transaction* means any modification or election of a contractual provision with respect to an in-force policy that does not generate new sales compensation.

§ 224.4 Duties of insurers and producers with respect to sales transactions.

(a) In recommending a sales transaction to a consumer, the producer, or the insurer where no producer is involved, shall act in the best interest of the consumer.

(b) The producer, or insurer where no producer is involved, acts in the best interest of the consumer when:

- (1) the producer's or insurer's recommendation to the consumer are based on an evaluation of the relevant suitability information of the consumer and reflects the care, skill, prudence, and diligence that a prudent person acting in a like capacity and familiar with such matters would use under the circumstances. The financial or other interests of the producer, insurer, or any other party other than the consumer, shall not be considered in any respect in making the recommendation;
- (2) the sales transaction is suitable; and
- (3) there is a reasonable basis to believe:
- (i) the consumer has been reasonably informed of various features of the policy and potential consequences of the sales transaction, both favorable and unfavorable, such as the potential surrender period and surrender charge, any secondary guarantee period, equity-index features, availability of cash value, potential tax implications if the consumer sells, modifies, surrenders, lapses or annuitizes the policy, death benefit, mortality and expense fees, cost of insurance charges, investment advisory fees, policy exclusions or restrictions, potential charges for and features of riders, limitations on interest returns, guaranteed interest rates, insurance and investment components, market risk, any differences in features among fee-based and commission-based versions of the policy, and the manner in which the producer is compensated for the sale and servicing of the policy in accordance with Part 30 of this Title (Insurance Regulation 194) and Insurance Law section 2119;
- (ii) the consumer would benefit from certain features of the policy, such as tax-deferred growth of any cash values, annuitization, or death or living benefit;
- (iii) the particular policy as a whole, the underlying subaccounts to which funds are allocated at the time of the sales transaction, and riders and similar product enhancements, if any, are suitable for the particular consumer based on the consumer's suitability information; and
- (iv) in the case of a replacement of a policy, the replacement is suitable including taking into consideration whether:
- (a) the consumer will incur a surrender charge, increased premium or fees, decreased coverage duration, decreased death benefit or income amount, adverse change in health rating, be subject to the commencement of a new surrender period, lose existing benefits (such as death, living or other contractual benefits), be subject to tax implications if the consumer surrenders or borrows from the policy, or be subject to increased fees, investment advisory fees, premium loads or charges for riders and similar product enhancements;
- (b) the consumer would benefit from policy enhancements and improvements, such as a decreased premium or fees, increased coverage duration, increased death benefit or income amount; and
- (c) the consumer has had another policy replacement, in particular, a replacement within the preceding 36 months.

(c) Prior to the recommendation of a sales transaction, a producer, or an insurer where no producer is involved, shall make reasonable efforts to obtain the consumer's suitability information.

(d)(1) Except as provided under paragraph (2) of this subdivision, neither a producer nor an insurer shall have any obligation to a consumer under subdivision (a) and (b) of this section or under subdivision (a) of section 224.6 of this Part related to any transaction if:

(i) no recommendation is made;

(ii) a recommendation was made and was later found to have been prepared based on materially inaccurate material information provided by the consumer;

(iii) a consumer refuses to provide relevant suitability information and the transaction is not recommended; or

(iv) a consumer decides to enter into a sales transaction that is not based on a recommendation of the insurer or the producer.

(2) An insurer's effectuation of a sales transaction with respect to its policies subject to paragraph (1) of this subdivision shall be suitable based on all the information actually known to the insurer at the time of the sales transaction.

(e) A producer, or an insurer where no producer is involved, shall at the time of a recommendation:

(1) disclose to the consumer all relevant suitability considerations and product information, both favorable and unfavorable, that provide the basis for any recommendations;

(2) document the basis for any recommendation made, subject to subdivisions (a) and (b) of this section and the facts and analysis to support that recommendation;

(3) if relevant, obtain a consumer signed statement documenting the consumer's refusal to provide suitability information, if any; and

(4) obtain a consumer signed statement acknowledging that a sales transaction is not recommended if a consumer decides to enter into a sales transaction that is not based on the producer's or insurer's recommendation.

(f) A producer shall not make a recommendation to a consumer to enter into a sales transaction unless the producer has a reasonable basis to believe that the consumer has the financial ability to meet the financial commitments under the policy.

(g) A producer shall not make a recommendation to a consumer to enter into a sales transaction about which the producer has inadequate knowledge.

(h) Neither a producer nor an insurer shall dissuade, or attempt to dissuade, a consumer from:

(1) truthfully responding to an insurer's request for confirmation of suitability information;

- (2) filing a complaint with the superintendent; or
- (3) cooperating with the investigation of a complaint.

(i) A producer shall not state or imply to the consumer that a recommendation to enter into a sales transaction is financial planning, comprehensive financial advice, investment management or related services unless the producer has a specific certification or professional designation in that area. A producer shall not use a title or designation of financial planner, financial advisor or similar title unless the producer is properly licensed or certified and actually provides securities or other non-insurance financial services.

(j) Any requirement applicable to a producer pursuant to this Part shall apply to every producer who has participated in the making of a recommendation and received compensation as a result of the sales transaction, regardless of whether the producer has had any direct contact with the consumer.

(k) Nothing in this Part shall be construed to prohibit the payment to a producer of any type or amount of compensation otherwise permitted under the Insurance Law and Part 30 of this Title (Insurance Regulation 194).

(l) A producer may limit the range of policies recommended to consumers based on a captive or affiliation agreement with a particular insurer, where the producer prominently discloses to each consumer in writing prior to a recommendation, in a form acceptable to the superintendent, the nature of the agreement and the circumstances under which the producer will and will not limit the recommendations. For example, without limitation, these circumstances may include where a producer primarily recommends policies of a particular insurer and secondarily recommends policies from one or more other insurers when: (1) the primary insurer does not offer a policy that meets the consumer's needs or objectives, (2) the type of policy in the best interest of the consumer is not available from the primary insurer, (3) the underwriting criteria of the primary insurer are not favorable for the consumer, or (4) the offer made by the primary insurer is not acceptable to the consumer. The producer shall adhere to the conditions in the disclosure with each consumer. The disclosure is insufficient if it merely states that the producer may limit recommendations without specific disclosure of the extent to which recommendations are, in fact, limited.

§ 224.5 Duties of insurers and producers with respect to in-force transactions.

(a) In recommending an in-force transaction to a consumer, the producer, or the insurer where no producer is involved, shall act in the best interest of the consumer.

(b) The producer, or insurer where no producer is involved, acts in the best interest of the consumer when:

(1) the producer's or insurer's recommendation to the consumer reflects the care, skill, prudence, and diligence that a prudent person acting in a like capacity and familiar with such matters would use under the circumstances. The financial or other interests of the producer, insurer, or any other party other than the consumer, shall not be considered in any respect in making the recommendation; and

(2) there is a reasonable basis to believe the consumer has been reasonably informed of the relevant features of the policy and potential consequences of the in-force transaction, both favorable and unfavorable.

(c) A producer shall not state or imply to the consumer that a recommendation to enter into an in-force transaction is financial planning, comprehensive financial advice, investment management or related services unless the producer has a specific certification or professional designation in that area. A producer shall not use a title or designation of financial planner, financial advisor or similar title unless the producer is properly licensed or certified and actually provides securities or other non-insurance services.

(d) Any requirement applicable to a producer pursuant to this Part shall apply to every producer who has participated in the making of a recommendation, regardless of whether the producer has had any direct contact with the consumer.

(e) A producer shall not make a recommendation to a consumer to enter into an in-force transaction about which the producer has inadequate knowledge.

§ 224.6 Insurer responsibility and supervision.

(a) In addition to the requirements of subdivisions (a) and (b) of section 224.4 of this Part and except as provided in subdivision (d) of section 224.4 of this Part, an insurer shall not effectuate a sales transaction with respect to its policies unless there is reasonable basis to believe that the sales transaction is suitable based on the consumer's suitability information.

(b) An insurer shall establish, maintain, and audit a system of supervision that is reasonably designed to achieve the insurer's and producers' compliance with this Part, including standards and procedures for:

(1) the collection of a consumer's suitability information with respect to sales transactions involving the insurer's policies;

(2) the documentation and disclosure of the basis for any recommendation with respect to sales transactions involving the insurer's policies;

(3) the review of complaints regarding recommendations inconsistent with the best interest of the consumer;

(4) the prevention of incentives that are intended or would reasonably be expected to cause producers to make recommendations that are not in the best interest of the consumer; and

(5) the auditing and/or contemporaneous review of recommendations to monitor producers' compliance with subdivisions (a) and (b) of section 224.4 of this Part and to identify contraventions of this Part. An insurer may use a reasonable risk-based approach to audit and/or contemporaneously review producers' recommendations to identify recommendations of the greatest risk or violation of this Part so long as the approach does not focus solely on recommendations posing the greatest risk with no auditing or review of other recommendations.

(c) An insurer shall be responsible for ensuring that every producer recommending any transaction with respect to the insurer's policies is adequately trained to make the recommendation in accordance with the provisions of this Part.

(d) An insurer shall establish and maintain procedures designed to prevent financial exploitation and abuse. For purposes of this subdivision, “financial exploitation and abuse” means improper use of an adult’s funds, property or resources by another individual, including fraud, false pretenses, embezzlement, conspiracy, forgery, falsifying records, coerced property transfers or denial of access to assets.

(e) An insurer of an in-force policy shall provide to a consumer all policy information reasonably requested by the consumer.

(f) Where an insurer offers different versions of a product, one with a fee-based structure and one with a commission-based structure, an insurer shall provide to the consumer a comparison, in a form acceptable to the superintendent, showing the differences between the products.

(g) In the case of a proposed replacement:

(1) the replaced insurer shall provide to a producer all relevant policy information that is necessary for the evaluation of the replacement; and

(2) the replacing insurer shall provide policy information in accordance with Part 51 of this Title (Insurance Regulation 60), regardless of whether there exists any specific section for the inclusion of the information within the disclosure statement set forth in Appendices 10A and 10B of Part 51.

(h) The insurer shall take appropriate corrective action for any consumer harmed by a violation of this Part by the insurer, the producer, or any third party with whom the insurer contracts. In determining any penalty or other disciplinary action against an insurer, the superintendent may consider as mitigation any appropriate corrective action taken by the insurer, or whether the violation was part of a pattern or practice on the part of the insurer.

§ 224.7 Recordkeeping.

All records required or maintained under this Part, whether by a producer, an insurer, or other person shall be maintained in accordance with Part 243 of this Title (Insurance Regulation 152).

§ 224.8 Violations.

A contravention of this Part shall be deemed to be an unfair method of competition or an unfair or deceptive act and practice in the conduct of the business of insurance in this state and shall be deemed to be a trade practice constituting a determined violation, as defined in Insurance Law section 2402(c), except where such act or practice shall be a defined violation, as defined in Insurance Law section 2402(b), and in either such case shall be a violation of Insurance Law section 2403.

§ 224.9 Effective date

This Part shall be effective March 1, 2019. As of the effective date, insurers and producers shall comply with the requirements of this Part for any transaction with respect to an annuity contract. Six months from the effective date, insurers and producers shall comply with the requirements of this Part for any transaction with respect to a life insurance policy.