

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

[Release No. 34-99310; File No. SR-CboeBZX-2024-001]

Self-Regulatory Organizations; Cboe BZX Exchange, Inc.; Notice of Filing and Immediate Effectiveness of a Proposed Rule Change To Amend Its Fee Schedule To Remove the Cross Asset Tier

January 10, 2024.

Pursuant to Section 19(b)(1) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (“Act”),¹ and Rule 19b-4 thereunder,² notice is hereby given that on January 2, 2024, Cboe BZX Exchange, Inc. (the “Exchange” or “BZX”) filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (“Commission”) the proposed rule change as described in Items I, II, and III below, which Items have been prepared by the Exchange. The Commission is publishing this notice to solicit comments on the proposed rule change from interested persons.

I. Self-Regulatory Organization’s Statement of the Terms of Substance of the Proposed Rule Change

Cboe BZX Exchange, Inc. (the “Exchange” or “BZX”) proposes to amend its Fee Schedule. The text of the proposed rule change is provided in Exhibit 5.

The text of the proposed rule change is also available on the Exchange’s website (http://markets.cboe.com/us/equities/regulation/rule_filings/bzx/), at the Exchange’s Office of the Secretary, and at the Commission’s Public Reference Room.

II. Self-Regulatory Organization’s Statement of the Purpose of, and Statutory Basis for, the Proposed Rule Change

In its filing with the Commission, the Exchange included statements concerning the purpose of and basis for the proposed rule change and discussed any comments it received on the proposed rule change. The text of these statements may be examined at the places specified in Item IV below. The Exchange has prepared summaries, set forth in sections A, B, and C below, of the most significant aspects of such statements.

A. Self-Regulatory Organization’s Statement of the Purpose of, and Statutory Basis for, the Proposed Rule Change

1. Purpose

The Exchange proposes to amend its Fee Schedule applicable to its equities trading platform (“BZX Equities”) by deleting the Cross Asset Tier (and a related definition) from the Fee Schedule. The Exchange proposes to implement these changes effective January 2, 2024.

The Exchange first notes that it operates in a highly competitive market in which market participants can readily direct order flow to competing venues if they deem fee levels at a particular venue to be excessive or incentives to be insufficient. More specifically, the Exchange is only one of 16 registered equities exchanges, as well as a number of alternative trading systems and other off-exchange venues that do not have similar self-regulatory responsibilities under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (the “Act”), to which market participants may direct their order flow. Based on publicly available information,³ no single registered equities exchange has more than 15% of the market share. Thus, in such a low-concentrated and highly competitive market, no single equities exchange possesses significant pricing power in the execution of order flow. The Exchange in particular operates a “Maker-Taker” model whereby it pays rebates to members that add liquidity and assesses fees to those that remove liquidity. The Exchange’s Fee Schedule sets forth the standard rebates and rates applied per share for orders that provide and remove liquidity, respectively. Currently, for orders in securities priced at or above \$1.00, the Exchange provides a standard rebate of \$0.00160 per share for orders that add liquidity and assesses a fee of \$0.0030 per share for orders that remove liquidity.⁴ For orders in securities priced below \$1.00, the Exchange provides a standard rebate of \$0.00009 [sic] per share for orders that add liquidity and assesses a fee of 0.30% of the total dollar value for orders that remove liquidity.⁵ Additionally, in response to the competitive environment, the Exchange also offers tiered pricing which provides Members opportunities to qualify for higher rebates or reduced fees where certain volume criteria and thresholds are met.

³ See Cboe Global Markets, U.S. Equities Market Volume Summary, Month-to-Date (December 19, 2023), available at https://www.cboe.com/us/equities/market_statistics/.

⁴ See BZX Equities Fee Schedule, Standard Rates.

⁵ *Id.*

Tiered pricing provides an incremental incentive for Members to strive for higher tier levels, which provides increasingly higher benefits or discounts for satisfying increasingly more stringent criteria.

Cross Asset Tier

Under footnote 2 of the Fee Schedule, the Exchange offers various Step-Up Tiers that provide enhanced rebates for orders yielding fee codes B,⁶ V⁷ and Y⁸ where a Member reaches certain add volume-based criteria, including “growing” its volume over a certain baseline month. Additionally, under footnote 2, the Exchange offers a Cross Asset Tier which is designed to incentivize Members to achieve certain levels of participation on both the Exchange’s equities and options platform (“BZX Options”). The Exchange now proposes to delete the Cross Asset Tier from the Fee Schedule as the tier expired on December 31, 2023. Additionally, the Exchange does not wish to, nor is required to, maintain such tier by proposing to amend the expiration date or the criteria associated with the Cross Asset Tier. More specifically, the proposed change lets this tier expire as the Exchange would rather redirect future resources and funding into other programs and tiers intended to incentivize increased order flow. In conjunction with discontinuing the Cross Asset Tier, the Exchange proposes to remove the definition of Customer ADAV⁹ from its fee schedule as this definition is not used for any other tier.

2. Statutory Basis

The Exchange believes the proposed rule change is consistent with the Act and the rules and regulations thereunder applicable to the Exchange and, in particular, the requirements of Section 6(b) of the Act.¹⁰ Specifically, the Exchange believes the proposed rule change is consistent with the Section 6(b)(5)¹¹ requirements that the rules of an exchange be designed to prevent fraudulent and manipulative acts and practices, to promote just and equitable principles of trade, to foster cooperation and coordination with persons engaged in regulating, clearing, settling,

⁶ Fee code B is appended to displayed orders that add liquidity to BZX in Tape B securities.

⁷ Fee code V is appended to displayed orders that add liquidity to BZX in Tape A securities.

⁸ Fee code Y is appended to displayed orders that add liquidity to BZX in Tape C securities.

⁹ Customer ADAV means average daily volume calculated as the number of contracts added for the account of a Priority Customer as defined in BZX Rule 16.1.

¹⁰ 15 U.S.C. 78f(b).

¹¹ 15 U.S.C. 78f(b)(5).

¹ 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(1).

² 17 CFR 240.19b-4.

processing information with respect to, and facilitating transactions in securities, to remove impediments to and perfect the mechanism of a free and open market and a national market system, and, in general, to protect investors and the public interest. Additionally, the Exchange believes the proposed rule change is consistent with the Section 6(b)(5)¹² requirement that the rules of an exchange not be designed to permit unfair discrimination between customers, issuers, brokers, or dealers as well as Section 6(b)(4)¹³ as it is designed to provide for the equitable allocation of reasonable dues, fees and other charges among its Members and other persons using its facilities.

The Exchange believes that its proposal to eliminate the Cross Asset Tier and the related definition of Customer ADAV from the Fee Schedule is reasonable because the tier has expired. Additionally, the Exchange is not required to maintain this tier by amending the criteria or extending the expiration date to a date in the future nor is it required to provide Members an opportunity to receive enhanced rebates. The Exchange believes its proposal to let the tier expire is also equitable and not unfairly discriminatory because it applies to all Members (*i.e.*, the tier will not be available for any Member). The Exchange also notes that the proposed rule change to remove this tier merely results in Members not receiving an enhanced rebate, which, as noted above, the Exchange is not required to offer or maintain. Furthermore, the proposed rule change to let the Cross Asset Tier expire enables the Exchange to redirect resources and funding into other programs and tiers intended to incentivize increased order flow.

B. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement on Burden on Competition

The Exchange does not believe that the proposed rule change will impose any burden on competition that is not necessary or appropriate in furtherance of the purposes of the Act. Rather, as discussed above, the Exchange believes that the proposed change would encourage the submission of additional order flow to a public exchange, thereby promoting market depth, execution incentives and enhanced execution

opportunities, as well as price discovery and transparency for all Members. As a result, the Exchange believes that the proposed changes further the Commission's goal in adopting Regulation NMS of fostering competition among orders, which promotes "more efficient pricing of individual stocks for all types of orders, large and small."

The Exchange believes the proposed rule changes do not impose any burden on intramarket competition that is not necessary or appropriate in furtherance of the purposes of the Act. Particularly, the proposed change to not renew the Cross Asset Tier and delete it and the related definition of Customer ADAV from the Fee Schedule will not impose any burden on intramarket competition because the changes apply to all Members uniformly, as in, the tier will no longer be available to any Member in accordance with its expiration date.

Next, the Exchange believes the proposed rule changes does not impose any burden on intermarket competition that is not necessary or appropriate in furtherance of the purposes of the Act. As previously discussed, the Exchange operates in a highly competitive market. Members have numerous alternative venues that they may participate on and direct their order flow, including other equities exchanges, off-exchange venues, and alternative trading systems. Additionally, the Exchange represents a small percentage of the overall market. Based on publicly available information, no single equities exchange has more than 15% of the market share.¹⁴ Therefore, no exchange possesses significant pricing power in the execution of order flow. Indeed, participants can readily choose to send their orders to other exchange and off-exchange venues if they deem fee levels at those other venues to be more favorable. Moreover, the Commission has repeatedly expressed its preference for competition over regulatory intervention in determining prices, products, and services in the securities markets. Specifically, in Regulation NMS, the Commission highlighted the importance of market forces in determining prices and SRO revenues and, also, recognized that current regulation of the market system "has been remarkably successful in promoting market competition in its

broader forms that are most important to investors and listed companies."¹⁵ The fact that this market is competitive has also long been recognized by the courts. In *NetCoalition v. Securities and Exchange Commission*, the D.C. Circuit stated as follows: "[n]o one disputes that competition for order flow is 'fierce.' . . . As the SEC explained, '[i]n the U.S. national market system, buyers and sellers of securities, and the broker-dealers that act as their order-routing agents, have a wide range of choices of where to route orders for execution'; [and] 'no exchange can afford to take its market share percentages for granted' because 'no exchange possesses a monopoly, regulatory or otherwise, in the execution of order flow from broker dealers'. . . .".¹⁶ Accordingly, the Exchange does not believe its proposed fee change imposes any burden on competition that is not necessary or appropriate in furtherance of the purposes of the Act.

C. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement on Comments on the Proposed Rule Change Received From Members, Participants, or Others

The Exchange neither solicited nor received comments on the proposed rule change.

III. Date of Effectiveness of the Proposed Rule Change and Timing for Commission Action

The foregoing rule change has become effective pursuant to Section 19(b)(3)(A) of the Act¹⁷ and paragraph (f) of Rule 19b-4¹⁸ thereunder. At any time within 60 days of the filing of the proposed rule change, the Commission summarily may temporarily suspend such rule change if it appears to the Commission that such action is necessary or appropriate in the public interest, for the protection of investors, or otherwise in furtherance of the purposes of the Act. If the Commission takes such action, the Commission will institute proceedings to determine whether the proposed rule change should be approved or disapproved.

¹⁵ See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 51808 (June 9, 2005), 70 FR 37496, 37499 (June 29, 2005).

¹⁶ *NetCoalition v. SEC*, 615 F.3d 525, 539 (D.C. Cir. 2010) (quoting Securities Exchange Act Release No. 59039 (December 2, 2008), 73 FR 74770, 74782-83 (December 9, 2008) (SR-NYSEArca-2006-21)).

¹⁷ 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(3)(A).

¹⁸ 17 CFR 240.19b-4(f).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ 15 U.S.C. 78f(b)(4).

¹⁴ *Supra* note 3.

IV. Solicitation of Comments

Interested persons are invited to submit written data, views, and arguments concerning the foregoing, including whether the proposed rule change is consistent with the Act. Comments may be submitted by any of the following methods:

Electronic Comments

- Use the Commission's internet comment form (<https://www.sec.gov/rules/sro.shtml>); or
- Send an email to rule-comments@sec.gov. Please include file number SR-CboeBZX-2024-001 on the subject line.

Paper Comments

- Send paper comments in triplicate to Secretary, Securities and Exchange Commission, 100 F Street NE, Washington, DC 20549-1090.
- All submissions should refer to file number SR-CboeBZX-2024-001. This file number should be included on the subject line if email is used. To help the Commission process and review your comments more efficiently, please use only one method. The Commission will post all comments on the Commission's internet website (<https://www.sec.gov/rules/sro.shtml>). Copies of the submission, all subsequent amendments, all written statements with respect to the proposed rule change that are filed with the Commission, and all written communications relating to the proposed rule change between the Commission and any person, other than those that may be withheld from the public in accordance with the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 552, will be available for website viewing and printing in the Commission's Public Reference Room, 100 F Street NE, Washington, DC 20549, on official business days between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Copies of the filing also will be available for inspection and copying at the principal office of the Exchange. Do not include personal identifiable information in submissions; you should submit only information that you wish to make available publicly. We may redact in part or withhold entirely from publication submitted material that is obscene or subject to copyright protection. All submissions should refer to file number SR-CboeBZX-2024-001 and should be submitted on or before February 7, 2024.

For the Commission, by the Division of Trading and Markets, pursuant to delegated authority.¹⁹

Sherry R. Haywood,

Assistant Secretary.

[FR Doc. 2024-00711 Filed 1-16-24; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8011-01-P

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

[Investment Company Act Release No. 35089; File No. 812-15479]

Venerable Insurance and Annuity Company, et al.

January 11, 2024.

AGENCY: Securities and Exchange Commission ("Commission" or "SEC").

ACTION: Notice.

Notice of application for an order pursuant to section 11 of the Investment Company Act of 1940 (the "Act").

SUMMARY OF APPLICATION: Applicants request an order approving the terms of an offer of exchange of certain annuity contracts issued by Equitable Financial Life Insurance Company ("EFLIC") and made available through Separate Account No. 49 of Equitable Financial Life Insurance Company for virtually identical annuity contracts issued by Venerable Insurance and Annuity Company ("VIAC") and made available through the Separate Account EQ of Venerable Insurance and Annuity Company, pursuant to an assumption reinsurance agreement between VIAC and EFLIC.

APPLICANTS: Venerable Insurance and Annuity Company, Separate Account EQ of Venerable Insurance and Annuity Company, and Directed Services LLC.

FILING DATES: The application was filed on June 27, 2023 and amended on October 13, 2023.

HEARING OR NOTIFICATION OF HEARING:

An order granting the requested relief will be issued unless the Commission orders a hearing. Interested persons may request a hearing on any application by emailing the SEC's Secretary at Secretarys-Office@sec.gov and serving the Applicants with a copy of the request by email, if an email address is listed for the relevant Applicant below, or personally or by mail, if a physical address is listed for the relevant

Applicant below. Hearing requests should be received by the Commission by 5:30 p.m. on February 5, 2024, and should be accompanied by proof of service on applicants, in the form of an affidavit or, for lawyers, a certificate of service. Pursuant to rule 0-5 under the Act, hearing requests should state the nature of the writer's interest, any facts bearing upon the desirability of a hearing on the matter, the reason for the request, and the issues contested. Persons who wish to be notified of a hearing may request notification by emailing the Commission's Secretary at Secretarys-Office@sec.gov.

ADDRESSES: The Commission: Secretarys-Office@sec.gov. Applicants: J. Neil McMurdie, neil.mcmurdie@venerable.com.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jill Ehrlich, Senior Counsel, or Lisa Reid Ragen, Branch Chief, at (202) 551-6825 (Division of Investment Management, Chief Counsel's Office).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: For Applicants' representations, legal analysis, and conditions, please refer to Applicants' first amended and restated application, dated October 13, 2023, which may be obtained via the Commission's website by searching for the file number at the top of this document, or for an Applicant using the Company name search field, on the SEC's EDGAR system. The SEC's EDGAR system may be searched at, <https://www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/legacy/companysearch.html>. You may also call the SEC's Public Reference Room at (202) 551-8090.

For the Commission, by the Division of Investment Management, under delegated authority.

Sherry R. Haywood,

Assistant Secretary.

[FR Doc. 2024-00791 Filed 1-16-24; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8011-01-P

¹⁹ 17 CFR 200.30-3(a)(12).