

Prepared Remarks of Acting Director Uejio For AFR's Celebration of the CFPB's 10th Birthday

JUL 19, 2021

Thank you for inviting me to celebrate the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's 10th anniversary. I want to first recognize Senator Warren and Representative Waters – your combined vision and support gave rise to the CFPB and has allowed it to fulfill its mission for the past 10 years. Without you, the CFPB would not exist.

I also want to thank Americans for Financial Reform. The coalition assembled by AFR to advocate on behalf of American consumers helped convince Congress to create the CFPB eleven years ago. Without your steadfast initial and continuing advocacy, the CFPB may have continued to exist only in a proposed policy binder or been relegated to a case study in a law school textbook. I especially want to thank AFR's executive director, Lisa Donner. Your efforts to assemble, lead, and manage this coalition of over 200 groups speaks to your unyielding commitment to racial and socioeconomic equity, financial stability, and the right of the American people to be heard both by their representatives in Congress and by the financial industry.

The dedication of Senator Warren, Representative Waters, Executive Director Donner, and AFR consistently encourages the Bureau, as Richard Cordray put it, to fulfill both the spirit and the mandate of Congress through the Dodd-Frank Act.

Today, I will talk about consumers' lived experience, the importance of enforcement, how we're helping consumers harmed by the pandemic, and our commitment to racial and economic equity.

Consumer Empowerment

One of our most valuable assets is the voice of consumers. At AFR you know this well: you give a voice to consumers when you share people's views with local, state, and federal policymakers. At the CFPB, we give people a way to share their voice through consumer complaints. The complaint process empowers consumers by allowing them to highlight problems they're experiencing, share that experience with others, and receive a response. Since 2011, we have received more than 3 million complaints, and 99% of complaints we send to companies receive a timely response. Recently, we have been receiving more than 75,000 complaints every month, a testament to the scale of the financial hardships in our nation today. The consumer experience will always be an invaluable part of our work, and we will continue to ensure companies engage with consumers to address problems.

Enforcement

Consumer rights are mere abstractions until they are enforced, and the CFPB's supervision and enforcement efforts have had a tremendous impact on the marketplace, ensuring that companies live up to their obligations to consumers, or face appropriate consequences.

Since 2011, the CFPB's enforcement and supervision work has resulted in approximately \$14.4 billion in consumer relief, and its enforcement actions have resulted in \$1.7 billion in civil penalties. That work has helped millions of consumers and stopped many of the most egregious practices in the marketplace, but there is much more to be done.

COVID-19 Response

The CFPB was created in part to respond to the next economic crisis. But we did not expect the CFPB's first economic crisis would be created by a deadly pandemic and the economic devastation it carried in its wake. Though vaccines are now widely available, and the economic recovery is proceeding, in the coming days and weeks many local, state, and federal housing protections will end, and millions of Americans will face foreclosure and eviction. COVID-19 plunged a record number of Americans into housing insecurity, and we are focused on helping homeowners and renters during this difficult time.

Our new amendments to the Mortgage Servicing Rules will ensure that the millions of homeowners exiting forbearance later this year will have the time and support to make the decision that best fits their individual and family needs. Similarly, the CDC's eviction moratorium that we bolstered with an FDCPA rule is ending on July 31, and millions of renters may soon seek new housing. Earlier this month we issued a bulletin for landlords and tenant screening companies. We reminded them of their responsibility to only include accurate information in tenants' reports and to conduct proper investigations when consumers dispute information. We will closely monitor their compliance, and we will use all our tools, including enforcement, to protect consumers during this critical transition.

Racial Equity

Upon becoming the CFPB's Acting Director, I placed racial equity at the center of our actions. The pandemic and its economic and housing crises further exposed longstanding racial inequities across our society, and the CFPB is committed to promoting racial and economic equity in the consumer finance marketplace. We have elevated and expanded existing investigations and supervisory exams, and added new ones, to ensure we have a healthy docket intended to address racial inequity. A core part of our work on racial and economic equity must be protecting communities of color from predatory financial practices, including predatory payday lending. We continue to believe that ability to repay is an important underwriting standard. To the extent small dollar lenders' business models rely on consumers' inability to repay, those practices cause harm that must be addressed by the CFPB.

When we focus our attention to minority, vulnerable, and overlooked communities, we help everyone. As Maya Angelou said, "no one of us can be free until everybody is free." We cannot

have a truly competitive, innovative financial marketplace that responds to all consumers' needs until *all* consumers are able to enter the marketplace on equal footing with full knowledge and the ability to seek redress.

I want to again thank Senator Warren and Representative Waters for their continued support, and AFR and its coalition for supporting the CFPB, its mission, and the American consumer.

Happy birthday, CFPB. Thank you.