1 Terri H. Didion, Assistant United States Trustee E-Filed: September 23, 2022 State Bar No. CA 133491 2 Edward M. McDonald Jr., Trial Attorney State Bar No. NY 4126009 3 edward.m.mcdonald@usdoj.gov 4 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE Office of the United States Trustee 5 300 Las Vegas Boulevard, So., Ste. 4300, Las Vegas, NV 89101 Cell: (202) 603-5222 6 Tel.: (702) 388-6600, Ext. 234 7 Fax: (702) 388-6658 8 Attorneys for the U.S. Trustee for Region 17 TRACY HOPE DAVIS 9 10 UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT **DISTRICT OF NEVADA** 11 Case No: BK-S-22-11824-ABL 12 In re Chapter 11 13 FRONT SIGHT MANAGEMENT LLC, Date: September 30, 2022 14 Time: 9:30 a.m. Debtor. Location: Foley Courtroom 1, Telephonic 15 **OBJECTION AND RESERVATION OF RIGHTS OF THE** 16 U.S. TRUSTEE TO THE DEBTOR'S MOTION FOR ENTRY OF ORDER: (I) APPROVING THE DISCLOSURE STATEMENT; (II) APPROVING THE FORM OF 17 BALLOTS AND PROPOSED SOLICITATION AND TABULATION PROCEDURES; 18 (III) FIXING THE VOTING DEADLINE WITH RESPECT TO THE DEBTR'S CHAPTER 11 PLAN; (IV) FIXING THE LAST DATE FOR FILING OBJECTIONS TO 19 THE CHAPTER 11 PLAN; AND (V) SCHEDULING A HEARING TO CONSIDER **CONFIRMATION OF THE PLAN** 20 To the Honorable AUGUST B. LANDIS, Chief United States Bankruptcy Judge: 21 Tracy Hope Davis, United States Trustee for Region 17 (the "U.S. Trustee"), by and 22 through her undersigned counsel, hereby objects (the "Objection") to the *Debtor's Motion for* 23 Entry of Order: (i) Approving the Disclosure Statement; (ii) Approving the Form of Ballots and 24 Proposed Solicitation and Tabulation Procedures; (iii) Fixing the Voting Deadline with Respect 25 to the Debtr's Chapter 11 Plan; (iv) Fixing the Last Date for Filing Objections to the Chapter 11 26 Plan; and (v) Scheduling a Hearing to Consider Confirmation of the plan [ECF No. 339] (the 27 "Motion") filed by captioned debtor Front Sight Management LLC ("Debtor"), which seeks, 28

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inter alia, approval of the Debtor's first amended *Disclosure Statement* [ECF No. 338] describing Debtor's first amended *Plan* [ECF No. 337].¹

I. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

The Debtor's Disclosure Statement fails to contain adequate information and the Motion does not provide creditors or parties in interest with adequate notice. For these reasons, the Court should sustain the U.S. Trustee's objection and deny the Motion and approval of the Disclosure Statement.

In support the U.S. Trustee states the following:

II. MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

FACTS

- 1. On May 24, 2022, the Debtor filed a voluntary petition under Chapter 11 commencing this case. [See ECF No. 1; see also ECF No. 109].
- 2. The Section 341 meeting of creditors was held on June 23, 2022 and concluded. [See ECF Nos. 3, 58, 86 & 188].
- 3. On June 9, 2022, the U.S. Trustee filed a Notice of Appointment of an Official Committee of Unsecured Creditors ("OCUC"]. [See ECF Nos. 115-116].
- 4. On June 15, 2022, Debtor filed its schedules and statement of financial affairs ("SOFA"). [See ECF No. 137].

¹ Hereafter, all references to "Section" in the Motion are to provisions of the Bankruptcy Code, title 11 of the United States Code, 11 U.S.C. §§ 101-1532 as amended, unless otherwise indicated. All references to "FRBP" are to the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure and to "FRE" are to the Federal Rules of Evidence.

The United States Trustee requests that the Court take judicial notice of the pleadings and documents filed in this case pursuant to FRBP 9017 and FRE 201. To the extent that this Objection contains factual assertions predicated upon statements made or documents filed by the Debtor or its agents or representatives, the U.S. Trustee submits that such factual assertions are supported by admissible evidence in the form of admissions of a party opponent under FRBP 9017 and FRE 801(d) (2).

- 5. Debtor's schedules list 4 secured creditors, 5 priority unsecured creditors, 2,904 unsecured non-priority creditors. [See ECF No. 137, pp. 19-77 of 104].
- 6. The Omnibus Declaration of Ignatius Piazza In Support of First Day Motions provides that Debtor has over 263,000 members. [See ECF No. 14, p. 4 of 22; ¶9; see also ECF No. 338, p. 31 of 105].
- 7. On June 2, 2022, the Court entered an order that establishes certain notice procedures and bar dates ("Notice/Bar Date Order"). [See ECF No. 82]. The "Notice of Bar Date for Filing Proofs of Claim" attached to the Notice/Bar Date Order provides that persons holding membership interests in the Debtor need not file proofs of claim, but that persons with claims that occurred before May 24, 2022 must file a proof of claim. [See ECF No. 82-4, p. 3 of 5; ¶¶ 1 & 2c]. The "Notice of Bar Date for Filing Proofs of Claim" attached to the Notice/Bar Date Order also provides that persons with claims resulting from rejections of executory contracts must file a proof of claim by the later of August 8, 2022 or 30 days after an order giving effect to the rejection. [See ECF No. 82-4, pp. 1 & 4 of 5; ¶¶ preamble & 3].
- 8. Debtor has filed four monthly operating reports ("MORs"): May 2022 [ECF No. 169], June 2022 [ECF No. 285], July 2022 [ECF No. 325], and August 2022 [ECF No. 354]. The MORs for May through July 2022 do not have all of the Debtor's bank account statements attached to them. [See ECF Nos. 169, 285 & 325]. The August 2022 MOR has a Bank of America account statement, 2 Bank of Texas account statements and a Wells Fargo account statement attached to it. [See ECF No. 354].
- 9. On September 9, 2022, Debtor filed the Disclosure Statement, Plan and Motion. [See ECF Nos. 337-339].
- 10. On September 12, 2022, the Court entered an order shortening time and setting the hearing on the Motion for September 30, 2022, with objections due by September 23, 2022. [See ECF No. 344].

- 11. The Motion requests that persons holding memberships who are not presently listed as creditors be served by email with only the Confirmation Hearing Notice and, if applicable, a ballot. [See ECF No. 339, pp. 9-10 of 24].
- 12. The proposed Confirmation Hearing Notice does provide that memberships will be rejected and that proofs of claim must be filed by approximately the end of December 2022. [See ECF No. 339, pp. 22-23 of 24]. The Disclosure Statement and Plan both provide that lifetime memberships will be rejected and claims resulting from rejected memberships interests must be filed by approximately the end of December 2022. [See ECF No. 337, p. 36 of 72; ECF No. 338, pp. 56-57 of 105].
- 13. The Disclosure Statement and Plan both contain sections on "Exculpations and Releases," Discharge, and "Continuing Stay/Injunction." [See ECF No. 338, pp. 56 (¶12) and 70-71 (¶VIII(A) & (B)); ECF No. 337, pp. 35-36 (¶12) and 42-43 (¶IV(A) & (B))]. The Confirmation Hearing Notice also contains paragraphs on the Injunction and "Exculpations and Releases." [See ECF No. 339, pp. 23-24 of 24; ¶¶4-5].
- 14. The Disclosure Statement provides that "[b]y accepting distribution pursuant to the Plan, each holder of an Allowed Claim receiving a Distribution pursuant to the Plan will be deemed to have specifically consented to the injunctions set forth in this Section." [See ECF No. 338, p. 71 of 105; lines 24-26].
- 15. The Disclosure Statement and the Plan both describe administrative claims as "Claims" that include all fees and charges assessed under 28 U.S.C. § 1930, that such administrative claims are subject to a bar date, and that all "Claims" and administrative claims are subject to allowance. [See ECF No. 337, pp. 12-15 of 72; ECF No. 338, pp. 20-22 of 105]. The Plan also provides that administrative claims will be paid in full as of the effective date, that after the effective date U.S. Trustee quarterly fees will be timely paid as they are incurred, and that the reorganized debtor will be responsible for paying U.S. Trustee fees. [See ECF No. 337, pp. 23 & 45 of 72].

- 16. The Disclosure Statement provides that Debtor does not believe there are any significant preference actions, that Debtor will retain all claims against insiders, including Dr. Piazza, and their retention was an important component of an integrated consideration package, between the Debtor, Dr. Piazza, the New Equity Investor, and the DIP lender, for the New Equity Investor's agreement to purchase the Debtor for \$19 million. [See ECF No. 338, pp. 53-54 of 105].
- 17. The Disclosure Statement dedicates five lines to risk factors, providing that the primary risk is in not confirming the Plan by either November 29, 2022 or December 1, 2022. [See ECF No. 338, p. 59 of 105; ¶3].
- 18. The Disclosure Statement provides that claims are disallowed if they were not scheduled (or established by a timely proof of claim). [See ECF No. 338, pp. 23-24 of 105; ¶36]. The Plan provides that confirmation will discharge all debts and liabilities, even unknown ones. [See ECF No. 33, p. 42 of 72; §IV(A), line 16].
- 19. The Disclosure Statement includes a chart in its liquidation analysis, however dollar amounts in the "high recovery" columns are lower than the dollar amounts in the "low recovery" columns. [See ECF No. 338, p. 102 of 105].

ARGUMENT

- 20. A debtor-in-possession may not solicit creditors to vote on a plan, unless, at the time of such solicitation, the debtor-in-possession provides creditors with a "written disclosure statement approved, after notice and a hearing, by the court as containing *adequate information*." *See* 11 U.S.C. § 1125(b) (emphasis added); *In re Kelley*, 199 B.R. 698, 703 (B.A.P. 9th Cir. 1996).
- 21. "Adequate information" is defined as information that is in sufficient detail to enable "a hypothetical investor" to make an informed judgment about the Plan. See 11 U.S.C. § 1125(a); In re Commercial Western Finance Corp., 761 F.2d 1329, 1331 n.1 (9th Cir. 1985).
- 22. Even if a disclosure statement provides adequate information, the disclosure statement should not be approved if the plan it describes is patently unconfirmable. *See, e.g., In*

re Beyond.com Corp., 289 B.R. 138, 140 (Bank. N.D. Cal. 2003) ("Because the underlying plan is patently unconfirmable, the disclosure statement may not be approved.").

- 23. "An elementary and fundamental requirement of due process in any proceeding which is to be accorded finality is notice reasonably calculated, under all the circumstances, to apprise interested parties of the pendency of the action and afford them an opportunity to present their objections." *Mullane v. Cent. Hanover Bank & Trust Co.*, 339 U.S. 306, 314 (1950).
 - A. The Disclosure Statement and the Motion should be Denied.
 Federal Rule of Bankruptcy 3016(c)
- 24. Federal Rule of Bankruptcy Procedure 3016(c) requires that "[i]f a plan provides for an injunction against conduct not otherwise enjoined under the Code, the plan and disclosure statement shall describe in specific and conspicuous language (bold, italic, or underlined text) all acts to be enjoined and identify the entities that would be subject to the injunction." Fed. R. Bankr. P. 3016(c).
- Although Federal Bankruptcy Rule 3016(c) mentions only injunctions, courts have interpreted it to apply to releases. *See In re Lower Bucks Hosp.*, 471 B.R. 419, 460 n.62 (Bankr. E.D. Pa. 2012), aff'd, 488 B.R. 303 (E.D. Pa. 2013), aff'd, 571 F. App'x 139 (3d Cir. 2014) ("Under a hyper-technical reading, Rule 3016(c) might be construed not to apply to a plan that includes a third-party 'release,' rather than 'injunction.' I decline to read the rule so narrowly."). In addition, "[a] discharge is in effect a special type of permanent injunction." *In re American Hardwoods*, 885 F.2d 621, 626 (9th Cir. 1989).
- 26. Accordingly, the Disclosure Statement, Plan, and Confirmation Hearing Notice sections that include a discussion of Exculpations, Releases, Injunctions or Discharge of conduct not otherwise enjoined under the Bankruptcy should be in bold, italic or underlined text.
- 27. In addition, the Disclosure Statement should provide more information on what "injunctions" creditors are consenting to by accepting plan distributions, whether 'accepting'

means voting for the Plan, and the Ballots should have two separate check boxes for voting in favor of the Plan and for consenting to "injunctions."

- 28. It is important to note that the Ninth Circuit has long held that Bankruptcy Code Section 524(e) precludes bankruptcy courts from discharging the liabilities of non-debtors. *See In re Lowenschuss*, 67 F.3d 1394, 1401-02 (holding that global release provision in plan was "contrary to § 524(e)"); *In re American Hardwoods, Inc.*, 885 F.2d 621, 626 (9th Cir. 1989) (permanent injunction that protected a non-debtor violated § 524(e)); *see also Blixseth v. Credit Suisse*, 961 F.3d 1074, 1082 (9th Cir. 2020) ("We have interpreted [Section 524(e)] generally to prohibit a bankruptcy court from discharging the debt of a non-debtor.").
- 29. The Disclosure Statement should therefore also provide information as to whether non-consensual, third party, non-debtor releases are permitted under Ninth Circuit law. Ultimately, the plan proponent bears the burden of proving that a plan satisfies the requirements of the Bankruptcy Code. *See In re PG & E Corp.*, 617 B.R. 671, 674 (Bankr. N.D. Cal. 2020). ²

² However, it must also be noted that "[c]onsensual third-party releases do not run afoul of section 524(e) or governing Ninth Circuit law" *See, e.g., In re PG & E Corp.*, 617 B.R. 671, 683 (Bankr. N.D. Cal. 2020).

But the hallmark of a consensual release is that it is voluntarily and knowingly given. See, e.g., In re Station Casinos, Inc., 2011 Bankr. LEXIS 5822, at *76 (Bkrtcy. D. Nev. June 8, 2011) ("A release of non-debtor third parties voluntarily and knowingly given ... does not implicate the concerns regarding third party releases discussed by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in Lowenschuss.") (emphasis added); In re Lower Bucks Hosp., 471 B.R. 419, 456–57 (Bankr. E.D. Pa. 2012) (a vote to accept a plan with a third-party release "should be an informed decision."); see also Black's Law Dictionary (11th ed. 2019) (defining consent as a "voluntary yielding to what another proposes or desires").

Here, the Plan and Disclosure Statement do little to draw creditors' attention to the significance of the releases, including through use of bolded, underlined or italicized text as required by Federal Bankruptcy Rule 3016(c). Moreover, the proposed ballot does not clearly show consent for the release through the use of separate check boxes.

Under these circumstances, the Debtor will not have demonstrated that the release of third parties by accepting creditors is knowing, voluntary and consensual. *Cf. In re PG & E Corp.*, 617 B.R. at 683 (overruling objections to releases by creditors who opted-in to the releases on their ballots, but distinguishing cases where "creditors or classes of creditors were deemed to have consented to releases of third parties *simply by voting in favor of the plan* or by not voting

<u>Treatment of Administrative Claims</u>

- 30. Fees assessed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1930(a)(6) are not synonymous with administrative expenses allowed pursuant to 11 U.S.C. § 503(b).
- 31. "Quarterly fees payable to the U.S. Trustee are assessed against Chapter 11 estates pursuant to § 1930(a)(6) of Chapter 123 of Title 28." U.S. Trustee v. Hirsch (In re Ehrman), 184 B.R. 362, 363-64 (D. Ariz. July 3, 1995)(emphasis added). See also U.S. Trustee v. Endy (In re Endy), 104 F.3d 1154, 1157 (9th Cir. 1997)(holding that quarterly fees had a higher priority than Chapter 11 administrative expenses in the case of a conversion to Chapter 7); Huisinga v. Carter (In re Juhl Enters.), 921 F.2d 800, 803 (8th Cir. 1990)("Nothing in the statutes indicates that the Trustee's quarterly fees are synonymous with § 503(b) administrative expenses.). Such fees are not subject to an allowance procedure.
- 32. The Disclosure Statement and Plan should clearly describe whether fees assessed under 28 U.S.C. § 1930 require the filing of a proof of claim and are subject to the allowance process.
- 33. To the extent that the Plan seeks to subject such fees to an allowance procedure by grouping such fees into the definition of "Administrative Claim" as set forth in the Plan, the U.S. Trustee objects.

Description of Treatment of Front Sight Members

- 34. A Bankruptcy Court may under certain circumstances temporarily allow claims or interests in an amount which the Court deems proper for the purpose of accepting or rejecting a plan. *See* Fed. R. Bankr. P. 3018(a).
- 35. In order to provide them with sufficient notice and information of how the Plan impacts them, Debtor should be required to serve, by email, the Debtor's membership holders with the Disclosure Statement, Plan and the Notice of Confirmation hearing, so that they can better determine whether they need to file proofs of claim, request provisional ballots under at all.") (emphasis added); *In re Station Casinos, Inc.*, 2011 Bankr. LEXIS 5822, at *76 (approving third-party release that was "plainly described" on the ballot used to solicit votes on the plan).

Federal Rule of Bankruptcy Procedure 3018(a), or object to the Plan. See Mullane v. Cent. Hanover Bank & Trust Co., 339 U.S. 306, 314 (1950).

36. Through the Notice/Bar Date Order, membership holders who were not listed as creditors were told they did not have to file proofs of claim. However, the Plan proposes to terminate their memberships and discusses the process of filing proofs of claim for termination damages after confirmation. The Disclosure Statement should provide information on how membership holders who may become creditors after their memberships are terminated can seek permission to vote on the Plan, for example, by requesting provisional ballots pursuant to Fed. R. Bankr. P. 3018(a), or otherwise how persons who may be owed money as a result of the membership termination under the Plan can vote for or against it.

Monthly Operating Reports

- 37. As Bankruptcy Courts have held, monthly reports and the financial disclosures contained in them "are the life blood of the Chapter 11 process" and are more than "mere busy work." *YBA Nineteen, LLC v. IndyMac Venture, LLC (In re YBA Nineteen, LLC),* 505 B.R. 289, 303 (S.D. Cal. 2014) (citation omitted). *See also In re Berryhill,* 127 B.R. 427, 433 (Bankr. N.D. Ind. 1991) (citation omitted).
- 38. Because MORs are an important source of information in a Chapter 11 bankruptcy case, the Disclosure Statement should refer creditors to those reports, and in addition, Debtor should file supporting bank account statement for all MORs.³

Preference Actions and Causes of Action Against Insiders

39. Generally, avoidance actions should be maintained for the benefit of unsecured creditors. Cf. Buncher Co. v. Official Comm. of Unsecured Creditors of GenFarm Ltd. P'ship

The "United States Trustee Chapter 11 Operating and Reporting Guidelines for Debtors in Possession (Revised September 2022)" provides that when debtors in possession file MORs in non-small business Chapter 11 cases that "[a]ll supporting documentation must be attached to each MOR." [See United States Trustee Chapter 11 Operating and Reporting Guidelines for Debtors in Possession (Revised September 2022), p. 4 of 6; §7(A), ¶¶4-5]. The instructions for Chapter 11 MORs include as supporting documents the Debtor's bank account statements. [See Instructions for UST Form 11-MOR: Monthly Operating Report and Supporting Documentation, p. 12 of 14].

IV, 229 F.3d 245, 250 (3d Cir. 2000) ("When recovery is sought under section 544(b) of the Bankruptcy Code, any recovery is for the benefit of all unsecured creditors"); see also McFarland v. Leyh (in Re Tex. Gen. Petroleum Corp.), 52 F.3d 1330, 1336 (5th Cir. 1995) ("[T]he general policy behind the assertion of avoidance actions. The proceeds recovered in avoidance actions should not benefit the reorganized debtor; rather, the proceeds should benefit the unsecured creditors. 5 Collier on Bankruptcy P 1123.02, at 1123-23 (Lawrence P. King ed., 15th ed. 1994).").4

- 40. The Disclosure Statement makes reference to Debtor not pursuing preference actions and also that retention of insider causes of action were an important part of the consideration in the integrated purchase transaction between the DIP Lender, DIP Lender's affiliate New Equity Investor, the Debtor and Dr. Piazza. [See ECF No. 338, p. 54 of 105].
- 41. The Disclosure Statement, however, does not describe what investigation the Debtor did with respect to those causes of action and provides no information on the potential value of those causes of action.
- 42. In addition, the Disclosure Statement does not describe what, if any, consideration Dr. Piazza contributed as part of that integrated transaction.

Risk Factors

- 43. The Disclosure Statement should provide more than five lines on the risks factors involved in the Plan, including when the default deadline runs, either in November 29 or December 1, 2022, and what the ramifications are for failing to secure a final confirmation order by that deadline.
- 44. The Disclosure Statement should also fix the Liquidation Analysis Chart and make clear that unscheduled claims where the creditor did not receive notice of this case will not

⁴ It is important to note that the Final Order: (I) Authorizing Debtor to Obtain Post-Petition Financing, (II) Granting Liens and Administrative Expense Claims, (III) Authorizing Debtor's Use of Cash Collateral, (IV) Modifying the Automatic Stay, and (V) Granting Other Related Relief [ECF No. 228] provides for a superpriority claim and secured lien on avoidance actions and claims against Insiders, although the DIP Lender is required to marshal the proceeds therefrom and, in the event of a default under the terms of the DIP loan, to draw upon those proceeds last. [See id., pp. 5 & 12-13 of 23].

be discharged. *See, e.g. In re Maya Constr. Co.*, 78 F.3d 1395, 1398-99 (9th Cir. 1996) ("[I]f a known contingent creditor is not given formal notice, he is not bound by an order discharging the bankruptcy's obligations.").

RESERVATION OF RIGHTS

45. The U.S. Trustee reserves her right to make any and all confirmation objections in connection with any confirmation hearing, including, but not limited to, objections with respect to (i) the payment of U.S. Trustee Quarterly Fees, and (ii) the permissibility of the Plan's releases, exculpations, and injunctions. The U.S. Trustee further reserves her right to supplement this Objection in the event that the Plan Proponent modifies or otherwise supplements the Disclosure Statement and/or the Motion.

CONCLUSION

46. Based on the foregoing, the U.S. Trustee respectfully requests that the Court (i) sustain the Objection and (ii) disapprove the Disclosure Statement.

WHEREFORE, the U.S. Trustee requests that the Court enter an order denying the Motion and the adequacy of the Disclosure Statement and granting such other and additional relief as is just and equitable.

Dated: September 23, 2022

Respectfully submitted,

TRACY HOPE DAVIS
UNITED STATES TRUSTEE, REGION 17

By: /s/ Edward M. McDonald Jr. Edward M. McDonald Jr., Esq., Trial Attorney