

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BEFORE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

COMMISSIONERS: Robert Pitofsky, Chairman
 Mary L. Azcuenaga
 Janet D. Steiger
 Roscoe B. Starek, III
 Christine A. Varney

In the Matter of)	
)	DOCKET NO. C-3729
)	
PRE-PAID LEGAL SERVICES, INC.,)	DECISION AND ORDER
a corporation.)	
)	

The Federal Trade Commission having initiated an investigation of certain acts and practices of the respondent named in the caption hereof, and the respondent having been furnished thereafter with a copy of a draft of complaint which the Denver Regional Office proposed to present to the Commission for its consideration and which, if issued by the Commission, would charge respondent with violation of the Federal Trade Commission Act; and

The respondent, its attorney, and counsel for the Commission having thereafter executed an agreement containing a consent order, an admission by the respondent of all the jurisdictional facts set forth in the aforesaid draft of complaint, a statement that the signing of said agreement is for settlement purposes only and does not constitute an admission by respondent that the law has been violated as alleged in such complaint, or that the facts as alleged in such complaint, other than jurisdictional facts, are true, and waivers and other provisions as required by the Commission's Rules; and

The Commission having thereafter considered the matter and having determined that it had reason to believe that the respondent has violated the said Act, and that a complaint should issue stating its charges in that respect, and having thereupon accepted the executed consent agreement and placed such agreement on the public record for a period of sixty (60) days, now in further conformity with the procedure prescribed in § 2.34 of its

Rules, the Commission hereby issues its complaint, makes the following jurisdictional findings and enters the following Order:

1. Respondent Pre-Paid Legal Services, Inc., is a corporation organized, existing, and doing business under and by virtue of the laws of the State of Oklahoma, with its office and principal place of business located at 321 E. Main Street, in the City of Ada, State of Oklahoma.

2. The Federal Trade Commission has jurisdiction of the subject matter of this proceeding and of the respondent, and the proceeding is in the public interest.

DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this Order:

- a. "Living trust" means a trust into which an individual can place all of his or her assets during his or her lifetime and, by transferring ownership of the assets to the name of the trust, thereby remove the assets from the individual's estate.
- b. "Probate" is the legal process that validates a will, the legal document that contains instructions to the court on how assets and liabilities are to be divided and distributed at death.

ORDER

I.

IT IS ORDERED that respondent Pre-Paid Legal Services, Inc., a corporation, its successors and assigns, and its officers, and respondent's agents, representatives, and employees, directly or through any corporation, subsidiary, division, or other device, including through any individual or entity with whom or which respondent has contracted to provide pre-paid legal services, in connection with the advertising, promoting, offering for sale, or sale of living trusts, do forthwith cease and desist from misrepresenting, in any manner, directly or by implication, orally or in writing, that:

- A. The use of a living trust avoids all probate and administrative costs.
- B. At death, a living trust allows assets to be distributed immediately or almost immediately.
- C. A living trust cannot be challenged.

- D. Living trusts are prepared by local attorneys.
- E. A living trust protects against catastrophic medical costs.
- F. A living trust is the appropriate estate planning device for every consumer.
- G. There are no disadvantages to a living trust.

II.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that respondent Pre-Paid Legal Services, Inc., a corporation, its successors and assigns, and its officers, and respondent's agents, representatives and employees, directly or through any corporation, subsidiary, division, or other device, including through any individual or entity with whom or which respondent has contracted to provide pre-paid legal services, in connection with the offering for sale or sale of living trusts, do forthwith cease and desist from failing to disclose, clearly and conspicuously, in writing, and prior to the consummation of the sale, the following information:

- A. Living trusts may be challenged on similar grounds as wills.
- B. Living trusts may not be appropriate in all instances, and all estate planning options should be examined before determining which estate plan best suits a particular individual's needs and wishes.

III.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that respondent Pre-Paid Legal Services, Inc., a corporation, its successors and assigns, and its officers, and respondent's agents, representatives and employees, directly or through any corporation, subsidiary, division, or other device, including through any individual or entity with whom or which respondent has contracted to provide pre-paid legal services, in connection with the offering for sale or sale of living trusts, do forthwith cease and desist from failing to disclose, clearly and conspicuously, in writing, and prior to the consummation of the sale, the following information, if true:

- A. The availability of informal probate under this state's statutes allows minimal or no contact with the courts and reduces the time required to probate a will.

- B. The transfer of an individual's assets into the living trust is not included in the price of creating the living trust.
- C. It is the sole responsibility of the purchaser of the living trust to transfer assets into the trust.
- D. Creditors have a longer period of time to file a claim against a living trust than against a probated estate.

IV.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that respondent Pre-Paid Legal Services, Inc., a corporation, its successors and assigns, and its officers, and respondent's agents, representatives and employees, directly or through any corporation, subsidiary, division, or other device, in connection with the advertising, promoting, offering for sale, or sale of living trusts by any individual or entity with whom or which respondent has contracted to provide pre-paid legal services, do forthwith cease and desist from failing to take reasonable steps sufficient to determine, commencing with the beginning of such a contractual relationship and continuing throughout the relationship, whether the promotion or sale involves any acts or practices prohibited by Paragraphs I, II and III of this Order. Such steps shall include, but are not limited to, evaluating, on a basis independent of the individual or entity with whom or which respondent has contracted to provide pre-paid legal services, the terms or conditions of sale, the adequacy of any disclosures, the representations made and the truthfulness of these representations (for the purposes herein, evaluating may, but need not, include reviewing advertisements, sales scripts and sales manuals, interviewing officers and employees, ascertaining the number and nature of consumer complaints and blind testing of oral representations).

V.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that respondent Pre-Paid and its successors and assigns shall, in accordance with the provisions of this Part, offer a refund in the amount of one hundred sixty-five dollars (\$165.00) to every purchaser of a living trust, except for (1) those purchasers residing in states with which Pre-Paid has previously settled, and (2) all other purchasers who have previously received refunds from either Pre-Paid or the American Association for Senior Citizens ("AASC").

A. Within thirty (30) days of the date that this Order becomes final, respondent shall compile and submit to the Commission a current mailing list containing the names and last

known addresses of all AASC members for whom living trusts were prepared by Pre-Paid and who reside in states with which Pre-Paid has not previously settled. Respondent shall also compile and submit to the Commission a list of all AASC members to whom respondent has paid refunds, indicating the amount of each refund and the date the refund was issued. In compiling these lists, respondent shall search all relevant records in the possession, custody, or control of the respondent, including but not limited to its unincorporated divisions, joint ventures, partnerships, operations under other names, affiliates, and all directors, officers, partners, employees, agents, consultants, franchisees, and any other person or entity, including independent contractors, working for or on behalf of any of the foregoing.

B. The Commission shall compile and maintain a list of consumers potentially eligible to receive refunds based on the information respondent is required to produce pursuant to V.A, above, and supplemented by such further relevant information in the Commission's possession or that comes to the Commission's attention.

C. The Commission or its designated agent shall mail a notification letter substantially in the form set out in Appendix 1 to all persons the Commission has reason to believe are eligible consumers, to advise each of: (a) the settlement with Pre-Paid, and (b) the consumer's right to receive a refund.

D. The Commission shall enclose with each notification letter described in V.C, above, a claim form substantially in the form set out in Appendix 2. Refund eligibility shall be based on submission of such form, which has been signed by either the AASC member or the beneficiary, next-of-kin or other representative of the member, if the member is deceased.

E. Any potentially eligible consumer who does not submit a completed and executed claim form in response to the Commission's notification letter by the date specified in the notification letter shall not be eligible to participate in the distribution; provided, that the Commission may in its discretion accept and process an untimely response to the notification letter.

F. The funds from any returned checks, and checks not cashed within 60 days after the distribution date, shall be redeposited into the redress fund for possible redistribution.

VI.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the consumer redress fund shall be established, administered, distributed and terminated under

the direction and control of the Commission and/or its designated agent. Respondent shall be notified, upon request, as to how the consumer refunds are distributed, but shall have no right to contest the manner of distribution chosen by the Commission. Within 30 days of completing the distribution of refunds pursuant to Part V of this Order, the Commission or its designated staff will provide written notification to the escrow agent specified in the Escrow Agreement attached as Appendix 3 to return to the Commission for transmittal to Pre-Paid any funds remaining in the escrow account that were not paid to consumers or to cover administrative costs of the escrow account. Nothing in this provision shall be construed to limit Pre-Paid's obligation under Parts V and VI of this Order to provide consumer refunds.

VII.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, for a period of three (3) years from the date of issuance of this Order, respondent, and its successors and assigns, shall maintain and upon request make available to a representative of the Federal Trade Commission for inspection and copying all documents relating to the advertising, promoting, offering for sale, or sale of living trusts that are developed, written, reviewed, authorized, or used by respondent, its successors and assigns, its officers, and its agents, representatives and employees, directly or through any corporation, subsidiary, division, or other device, or by any individual or entity with whom or which respondent has contracted to provide pre-paid legal services.

VIII.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that respondent shall notify the Federal Trade Commission, through its Denver Regional Office unless otherwise directed, at least thirty (30) days prior to any proposed change in the respondent, such as dissolution, assignment, or sale resulting in the emergence of a successor corporation, the creation or dissolution of new corporations, subsidiaries or affiliates of the respondent, the planned filing of a bankruptcy petition, or any other corporate change that may affect compliance obligations arising out of this Order.

IX.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that respondent shall:

- A. Within thirty (30) days of service of this Order upon it, provide a copy of this Order to each of respondent's current principals, officers, directors and managers and to all personnel, agents and representatives who are or have been participating or engaging in any manner in respondent's sales activities relating to living trusts.
- B. For a period of three (3) years from the date of issuance of this Order, provide a copy of this Order to each of respondent's principals, officers, directors and managers, and to all personnel, agents and representatives who are participating or engaging in any manner in respondent's sales activities relating to living trusts within three (3) days after the person assumes his or her position.

X.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this Order will terminate on April 4, 2017, or twenty years from the most recent date that the United States or the Federal Trade Commission files a complaint (with or without an accompanying consent decree) in federal court alleging any violation of the Order, whichever comes later; provided, however, that the filing of such a complaint will not affect the duration of:

- A. Any paragraph in this Order that terminates in less than twenty years;
- B. This Order's application to any respondent that is not named as a defendant in such complaint; and
- C. This Order if such complaint is filed after the Order has terminated pursuant to this paragraph.

Provided further, that if such complaint is dismissed or a federal court rules that the respondent did not violate any provision of the Order, and the dismissal or ruling is either not appealed or upheld on appeal, then the Order will terminate according to this paragraph as though the complaint was never filed, except that the Order will not terminate between the date such complaint is filed and the later of the deadline for appealing such dismissal or ruling and the date such dismissal or ruling is upheld on appeal.

XI.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that respondent shall, within sixty (60) days of service of this Order upon it, and at such other times as the Federal Trade Commission may require, file with the Commission a report, in writing, setting forth in detail the manner and form in which it has complied with this Order.

By the Commission.

Donald S. Clark
Secretary

ISSUED: April 4, 1997