

BEFORE THE ARIZONA CONFORM 1 2 WILLIAM A. MUNDELL **CHAIRMAN** AUG 2 9 2002 3 JIM IRVIN COMMISSIONER DOCKETED BY MARC SPITZER COMMISSIONER 5 DOCKET NO. S-03415A-01-0000 IN THE MATTER OF: 6 EASY MONEY AUTO LEASING, INC. 2102 E. Sharon Drive Phoenix, Arizona 85022 8 SUPERIOR FINANCIAL SERVICES, INC. 65162 2102 E. Sharon Drive DECISION NO. Phoenix, Arizona 85022 10 JAMES ANTHONY CICERELLI 11 13027 N. Surrey Circle Phoenix, Arizona 85029 12 DAVID PAUL FRENCH 13 2102 E. Sharon Drive Phoenix, Arizona 85022 14 Respondents. **OPINION AND ORDER** 15 DATE OF HEARING: November 13, 2001 16 Phoenix, Arizona PLACE OF HEARING: 17 Philip J. Dion III ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: 18 James Cicerelli, In Propria Persona; and APPEARANCES: 19 Mark Dinell, Securities Division, on behalf of 20 the Arizona Corporation Commission. 21 BY THE COMMISSION: 22 Having considered the entire record herein and being fully advised in the premises, the 23 Arizona Corporation Commission ("Commission") finds, concludes, and orders that: FINDINGS OF FACT 24 On May 14, 2001, the Securities Division ("Division") of the Commission filed a 25 1. Notice of Opportunity for Hearing Regarding Proposed Order to Cease and Desist, for Restitution, 26 for Administrative Penalties, and for Other Affirmative Action ("Notice") against Easy Money Auto 27 Leasing, Inc. ("Easy Money"), Superior Financial Services, Inc. ("SFS"), James Anthony Cicerelli 28

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and David Paul French (collectively the "Respondents") in which the Division alleged that Respondents have engaged in acts, practices, and transactions that constitute violations of the Arizona Securities Act ("Act").

2. The Respondents were duly served with copies of the Notice.

3. On May 29, 2001, David French filed a request for a hearing.

 4. On June 1, 2001, Easy Money, through its bankruptcy counsel, Mr. Robert Suzenski, filed a Notice of Bankruptcy, Notice of Stay, Limited Appearance and Request for a Hearing.¹

5. On June 11, 2001, the Commission issued a Procedural Order that set a pre-hearing conference for July 9, 2001.

6. On July 9, 2001, the pre-hearing was held as scheduled. Mr. Cicerelli appeared and was represented by counsel. Mr. Cicerelli, through his counsel, requested a hearing be set in this matter. Mr. French and SFS appeared without the aid of counsel. Mr. French appeared on behalf of SFS, and requested a hearing on behalf of SFS. Easy Money failed to appear, although it had requested a hearing in this matter. The Division also appeared with counsel.

7. During the pre-hearing, the Division stated it would not be responding to Easy Money's Notice of Stay because the Division had spoken with James Cross, who is the attorney for the bankruptcy trustee in Easy Money's bankruptcy case, and Mr. Cross agreed that the Stay does not apply to this proceeding. However, the Division indicated that if the Commission ordered restitution, then the Division would have to request the Bankruptcy Court to lift the Stay to enforce the restitution order. The Division indicated that those measures were not necessary if the Commission ordered fines, as they are penalties that are criminal in nature and therefore, the Stay does not affect them. No party objected the Division's comments and the portion of Easy Money's Notice regarding

a Stay was denied.

8. On August 7, 2001, a Procedural Order set this matter for hearing on October 1, 2001.

9. On September 17, 2001, the Commission received a letter from David French. In the letter, Mr. French requested a continuance of the hearing because he needed time to retain counsel.

¹ Easy Money filed for bankruptcy protection under Chapter 11 of the United States Bankruptcy Code in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Arizona in Case No. 00-09192-ECF-CGC on August 23, 2000.

- 10. On September 19, 2001, James Cicerelli, on behalf of himself, filed a Motion to Continue the hearing in order to retain counsel in this matter. Staff of the Hearing Division contacted Ms. Ivy Kushner, who had represented Mr. Cicerelli at the pre-hearing, regarding Mr. Cicerelli's Motion. Ms. Kushner indicated that she would be filing a Motion to Withdraw. Ms. Kushner indicated she would assist Mr. Cicerelli in his efforts to retain new counsel.
- 11. On September 19, 2001, the Division responded to Mr. French's letter and opposed the request for continuance. The Division also opposed Mr. Cicerelli's motion to continue the hearing.
- 12. On September 19, 2001, Staff of the Hearing Division contacted Mr. James Cross, attorney for the Easy Money bankruptcy trustee. Mr. Cross indicated that he would not take a position or appear in this matter.
- 13. On September 21, 2001, Staff of the Hearing Division contacted Mr. Robert Suzenski. Mr. Suzenski indicated that he represented Easy Money in its bankruptcy proceedings, but would not represent Easy Money in this matter.
- 14. On September 25, 2001, the Commission issued a Procedural Order that granted a continuance and rescheduled the hearing to November 13, 2001.
- 15. On October 25, 2001, Ms. Kushner filed a Motion to Withdraw. The Motion stated that Mr. Cicerelli consented to the Motion to Withdraw and Mr. Cicerelli's signature at the end of the Motion verified that fact. Therefore, Ms. Kushner's Motion to Withdraw was granted.
- 16. On November 14, 2001, a full public hearing was conducted before a duly authorized Administrative Law Judge at the Commission's offices in Phoenix, Arizona. Mr. Cicerelli was the only Respondent to appear for the hearing. The Division appeared and was represented by counsel. The Division indicated that it was prepared to proceed against Mr. David French, SFS and Easy Money in absentia. Therefore, the hearing against those three Respondents was held in absentia. Testimony was taken, and more than 50 exhibits were admitted into evidence in the course of the proceeding.
 - 17. On January 31, 2002, the Division submitted closing memoranda.
- 18. Mr. Cicerelli also filed some documents on January 31, 2002. The documents he filed were not in the form of a closing brief, but appear to be exhibits that Mr. Cicerelli wants the

- Commission to consider in deciding this case. Those documents were not disclosed prior to the hearing in Mr. Cicerelli's list of exhibits, were not brought to the Commission's attention during the hearing or entered into the record as evidence. Additionally, Mr. Cicerelli chose not to testify at the hearing and it appears he is trying to use some of those documents to circumvent being crossexamined. Therefore, we will not consider those documents in making our decision in this matter.
- 19. Easy Money is a Nevada corporation whose last known address is 10243 North Scottsdale Road, Ste. 5, Scottsdale, AZ 85253.
- SFS is a company whose last known address is 2102 East Sharon Drive, Phoenix, 20. Arizona 85022.
- James Anthony Cicerelli, whose last known address is 13027 North Surrey Lane, 21. Phoenix, Arizona 85029, was the President of Easy Money.
- David French, whose last known address is 2102 East Sharon Drive, Phoenix, Arizona 22. 85022, was the president of SFS and Secretary of Easy Money.
- Mr. French was at all relative times the sole proprietor in SFS and there is no evidence 23. that Mr. Cicerelli was involved in any way with SFS.
- Beginning in October of 1988, Respondents operated an automobile sale-lease-back 24. business. They represented that Easy Money would purchase automobiles from individuals in need of cash and then lease the cars back to those same individuals. The transaction required the individual to transfer his or her vehicle title to Easy Money. If the individual defaulted on the payments, Easy Money would repossess the vehicle.
- Respondents represented to investors that they needed capital in order to purchase the 25. vehicles that they intended to lease-back to the original owners.
- Respondents sold over 40 promissory notes and/or investment contracts to over 25 26. investors.
- The promissory notes and/or investment contracts stated that the investor would place 27. a certain amount of money into Easy Money's account for the purpose of purchasing, renting or leasing vehicles.
 - The promissory note and/or investment contract stated that investors would receive up 28.

DECISION NO. 65162

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to 2 1/2 percent interest per month, or an annual return of up to 30 percent.

- 29. Respondents represented that the promissory notes were fully secured by adequate collateral, that the investments were liquid and 100 percent secured and insured against loss. Further, Respondents handed out a brochure to prospective investors that indicated that Easy Money had an established and proven track record, extensive support and marketing, and virtually no competition.
 - 30. Investors were told by Respondents that there was no risk in investing in Easy Money.
- 31. During the hearing, the Division called Robert Hoffacker as a witness. Mr. Hoffacker testified that he was retired engineer who had some investment expertise. He testified he mainly invested in mutual funds and stocks. Mr. Hoffacker testified that he heard about Easy Money through his son and his daughter. Mr. Hoffacker's daughter, Louise Hoffacker, worked for Easy Money and was also listed as a Director of the company.
- 32. Mr. Hoffacker testified that he was about 80 years old when he met with Mr. Cicerelli. Mr. Hoffacker stated that Mr. Cicerelli told him about Easy Money's business plan. Mr. Cicerelli stated it was a lease-back situation in which Easy Money would purchase a vehicle from an individual and then lease it back to that same individual. Mr. Hoffacker stated that once the individual paid off the loan, Easy Money would return the title to the individual. However, if the individual did not pay off the loan, Easy Money would repossess the car.
- 33. Mr. Hoffacker testified that he was not told anything else about the business, nor did Mr. Cicerelli mention anything about the risk of running an automobile lease-back business.
- 34. Mr. Hoffacker further testified he asked Mr. Cicerelli for financial statements on a number of occasions, but never received a financial statement.
- 35. Mr. Hoffacker testified that he invested approximately \$40,000 in Easy Money in June of 1999 and \$100,000 with Easy Money in August of 1999.
- 36. Mr. Hoffacker testified that his investment of approximately \$40,000 was funded through an IRA rollover to Easy Money through the Paragon Bank. Mr. Hoffacker testified that he used the Paragon Bank to transfer his VanGuard IRA into Easy Money's account at the suggestion of Mr. Cicerelli.
 - 37. Mr. Hoffacker testified he thought his two investments were to be used for the purpose

of buying, leasing and renting vehicles.

- 38. Mr. Hoffacker did not believe that any of that money was going to be used to pay for the personal expenses of either Mr. Cicerelli or Mr. French or pay interest to other investors.
- 39. Mr. Hoffacker further testified that the Respondents never asked for his consent to use his money for any purpose other than the buying, leasing and renting of vehicles.
- 40. Mr. Hoffacker testified that he was promised a return of 2 1/2 percent per month, or 30 percent per year on his investment.
- 41. Mr. Hoffacker said that the payments were fairly regular for about six months and he received approximately \$17,000 before the payments suddenly stopped.
- 42. Mr. Hoffacker indicated that shortly after his investment in August, he sent Mr. Cicerelli a fax (dated November 2, 1999) asking to liquidate his loan in the amount of \$100,000. Mr. Hoffacker stated he had become suspicious because he kept asking for financial statements and never received any.
- 43. Mr. Hoffacker testified he faxed a letter (dated November 9, 1999) to Valley First Community Bank, which is the parent company of Paragon, and requested that his IRA with Easy Money be closed out immediately.
- 44. Mr. Hoffacker testified that he did not receive any of his money back. He stated that the only document he received was a letter from an attorney at law, Ms. Ivy Kushner, who represented Easy Money. The letter stated that they were going to repay Mr. Hoffacker by the end of 1999. However, Mr. Hoffacker testified he did not receive his money. Mr. Hoffacker further testified that he tried to contact Ms. Kushner on a number of occasions, but never made contact with her.
- 45. Mr. Hoffacker 'testified that it was his understanding that Easy Money filed for bankruptcy in the spring of 2000, which was about the time the payments from Easy Money ceased, and he has not received any money from the bankruptcy proceeding.
- 46. Mr. Hoffacker testified that he received a brochure about the company. He stated he was not exactly sure where he received the brochure, but he thought it was from Mr. Cicerelli.
 - 47. Mr. Hoffacker testified that the brochure entitled "Advantages of Easy Money Auto

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Leasing" stated that Easy Money had an established and proven track record, virtually no competition and that the investment was 100 percent secured and insured against loss.

- 48. Mr. Hoffacker testified that if he had known that Easy Money was only established in November of 1998 and did not have an established and proven track record, that would have affected his decision to invest his money with Easy Money.
- Mr. Hoffacker testified that had he known Easy Money had at least 12 different 49. competitors in the market, that would have affected his decision to invest money as 12 competitors was greater than "virtually no competition."2
- Mr. Hoffacker also testified that his investments were not 100 percent secured, nor 50. were they insured against loss as he had lost approximately \$120,000 of the money he invested with Easy Money.
- At the hearing, Mr. Hoffacker identified Mr. Cicerelli as the man who told Mr. 51. Hoffacker about the Easy Money business plan, that Mr. Cicerelli was the man who signed the contracts with Mr. Hoffacker and that he was the man who accepted his \$100,000 check and his \$40,000 IRA rollover.
- 52. On cross-examination, Mr. Hoffacker admitted that he knew his daughter made a commission on his investments.
- The Division next called Margaret Peirson as a witness. Ms. Peirson stated that she is 53. a 77-year-old woman who had completed high school and two years of college. She testified that she had never taken any classes in investing and the only type of investment she made was through the Fannie May Secondary Mortgage Company, which was an employee stock purchasing plan. Ms. Peirson testified that her employment history consisted of mostly clerical positions.
- Ms. Peirson testified that she heard about Easy Money through David French. She 54. testified that she was introduced to Mr. French through a friend.
- Ms. Peirson testified she called Mr. French and told him she was interested in the Easy 55. Money program as described to her by her friend. She stated that Mr. French then sent her some

² Mr. French had told another investor that there were at least twelve competitors in the market.

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material about Easy Money. During the phone conversation, Ms. Peirson said that Mr. French told her that Easy Money purchased automobiles and then leased them back to their original owners. She further testified that Mr. French never told her about the risk of the business, never asked about her financial background, and never asked about her financial net worth.

- The literature that Ms. Peirson received from Mr. French was in the form of a 56. brochure. She testified that she received a brochure entitled "Advantages of Easy Money Auto Leasing" in January of 1999.
- 57. Ms. Peirson testified that the brochure indicated that Easy Money had an established and proven track record.
- 58. She stated that she did not know that Easy Money had only been incorporated in November of 1998 and didn't think that three months was enough time to claim that Easy Money had an "established and proven record."
- 59. Ms. Peirson went on to state that the brochure told her that her investment would be 100 percent secure and insured against loss.
- 60. Ms. Peirson also stated that she received another brochure from Mr. French entitled "Auto Leasing Gross Return Table." She stated that the table did not talk about risk and explained how Easy Money was able to provide 30 percent return to investors.
- 61. Based on her conversation with Mr. French and the brochures she received about Easy Money, Ms. Peirson testified she invested \$10,000 in Easy Money in January of 1999.
- 62. She testified that her contract stated she would receive a return of 2.5 percent a month, or 30 percent annually.
- Ms. Peirson testified that she thought her \$10,000 would be used for the purpose of 63. buying and leasing vehicles.
- Ms. Peirson stated that she did not intend the company to use the money for any other 64. purposes such as paying for the personal expenses of the Respondents or to pay interest to other investors.
- 65. Ms. Peirson stated that the Respondents never asked for her consent to use the money for any purpose other than buying or leasing vehicles.

DECISION NO.

- 66. Ms. Peirson stated that the contract she entered into with Easy Money was signed by James Cicerelli, who was the President of Easy Money.
- 67. Ms. Peirson testified that at some point later, her money was returned to her by David French. Mr. French told her that there were too many investors and since she had only put in \$10,000, which was less than anyone else, Easy Money was returning her money. Mr. French then told her that if she was able to invest more money, they were going to start another company like Easy Money in Ohio.
- 68. Ms. Peirson admitted on cross-examination that she did receive a full refund of the \$10,000 she invested with Easy Money and received interest payments on the loan up until the time her money was refunded.
- 59. After subsequent conversations with Mr. French, Ms. Peirson testified she invested \$50,000 with Mr. French in June of 1999. Ms. Peirson stated that she did not invest the \$50,000 with Easy Money, but with a company called Superior Financial Services, Inc. Although the name was different, Mr. French told Ms. Peirson that the business was similar to Easy Money and that they were purchasing cars and leasing them back to the individual owners.
- 70. Ms. Peirson testified that in the agreement she signed with SFS, she recognized the signature of David French. The agreement stated that David French was the President of SFS.
- 71. Ms. Peirson testified that she subsequently made two additional investments of \$10,000 each to SFS in August of 1999. She again testified that the contract she signed with SFS had David French's signature, and he was listed as President of SFS.
- 72. Ms. Peirson testified that she received dividends from SFS for approximately six months and then the payments stopped in March of 2000. At that point, Ms. Peirson called Mr. French. Mr. French told her that he would Federal Express her interest payment within the week, and that she shouldn't be worried because if the company defaulted or were to go bankrupt, there were enough assets to pay all of the investors back.
 - 73. Ms. Peirson testified that she has not received any of her money back.
- 74. Ms. Peirson testified that she wrote a letter to Mr. French one month before her conversation with Mr. French regarding the missed interest payment, in which she asked for a return

³ Ms. Andrews appeared telephonically at the hearing.

of her money. Ms. Peirson indicated that she wanted to invest in something else and asked Mr. French for a refund. Ms. Peirson testified that she received a letter from Mr. French in which he recognized her request for a full return of her investment and told her that she would be the next lender to be paid in full. Ms. Peirson stated that she did not receive any payment from Mr. French.

- 75. The contract that Ms. Peirson signed with SFS has essentially the same terms and conditions as the contract she signed with Easy Money.
- 76. Ms. Peirson testified that, in her investments with Easy Money and SFS, she was a passive investor and did not make any decisions.
- 77. Based upon Ms. Pearson's testimony, she invested \$70,000 with SFS and received \$14,500 in the form of interest payments.
- 78. The Division also called Lynn Andrews.³ Ms. Andrews testified that she had previously invested in bonds and mutual funds, and that she was a very conservative investor. She further testified that she heard about Easy Money through friends of hers, Bonnie Hart and Rick Nab. Ms. Andrews testified that they told her about the wonderful returns they were making so she began considering investing with Easy Money.
- 79. Ms. Andrews testified that Ms. Hart and Mr. Nab put her in contact with Jim Cicerelli. She stated that she met Mr. Cicerelli in September or October of 1998.
- 80. Ms. Andrews testified that, at the meeting, Mr. Cicerelli told her that Easy Money was a very sound business and that he had personally been in the auto lease-back business for years with another entity called Superior Leasing. Ms. Andrews further testified that Mr. Cicerelli told her that he and his partner, Mr. French, were going to open up different offices around the country including Tucson and Cleveland. Ms. Andrews stated that Mr. Cicerelli told her that there was no risk in this business and that her investment would be completely 100 percent insured. Ms. Andrews further testified that he told her the name of an insurance company with which Easy Money was insured with, but she had since forgotten that name. Ms. Andrews stated that Mr. Cicerelli told her he was "just making a fortune" and that she would receive 30 percent on her money.

- 81. Ms. Andrews stated that it was her understanding that Easy Money had been in business for a while and that it was not a new company. She testified that she waited a couple of months before investing to see how Mr. Nab and Ms. Hart's investments panned out. She stated that those two friends informed her that they were making a fabulous return.
- 82. Ms. Andrews stated that she had her accountant look into Easy Money and do some due diligence.
- 83. Ms. Andrews testified that Mr. Cicerelli never told her about the risk involved in an operation like this. She further testified that in the fall of 1998 she received a financial statement from Easy Money containing profits and expenses that was in the form of a balance sheet.⁴ Ms. Andrews testified she assumed the balance sheet was accurate.
- 84. Ms. Andrews testified that she had her final meeting with Mr. Cicerelli in December of 1998. She stated she had decided to invest with Easy Money based upon her accountant's recommendations and Mr. Nab's and Ms. Hart's recommendations. She testified she told Mr. Cicerelli that she was willing to put \$20,000 into Easy Money, but Mr. Cicerelli indicated that in order to get the 30 percent return, she would have to put in more money. Ms. Andrews testified that she invested \$40,000 with Easy Money in December 1998.
- 85. Ms. Andrews testified that the \$40,000 was paid to Easy Money in the form of a check. She stated she brought the check to Mr. Cicerelli directly and handed it to him at his office.
- 86. Ms. Andrews testified that she received a brochure from Easy Money talking about its proven track record, the fact that there was no competition and that her investment was 100 percent secured and insured against loss.
- 87. Ms. Andrews testified that had she known Easy Money was only started in November, 1998, that there were competitors in the market and that her investment was not 100 percent secured and insured, she would not have invested with Easy Money.
- 88. Ms. Andrews testified that she entered into an investment contract with Easy Money and Mr. Cicerelli signed the contract as President of Easy Money.

⁴ Ms. Andrews testified she received those materials before November 1998 when Easy Money was incorporated in Nevada.

| 89 | . Ms | . Andrews' | contract | stated | that | she | would | place | up | to | \$40,000 | in | the | company |
|------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------|------|-----|-------|-------|----|----|----------|----|-----|---------|
| account fo | or the pu | rpose of lea | sing vehi | cles. | | | | | | | | | | |

- 90. Ms. Andrews testified that the contract promised her a return of 2.5 percent per month, or 30 percent annually.
- 91. Ms. Andrews testified that she expected Mr. Cicerelli, given his experience, and the other employees of Easy Money, to operate the business. She stated she was just a passive investor.
- 92. She further testified that she did not intend for her money to be used to pay the personal expenses of Mr. Cicerelli or Mr. French or that the money be used to pay interest to other investors.
- 93. She further testified that the Respondents never asked for her consent to use her money for anything other than leasing vehicles.
- Ms. Andrews testified that approximately six months after she invested with Easy Money, she was contacted by Mr. Cicerelli. She stated Mr. Cicerelli told her that she should invest up to \$100,000 more with Easy Money as they were expanding their operations. Ms. Andrews testified that she could not possibly raise that much money, and did not invest any more money with Easy Money.
- 95. Ms. Andrews testified that she received interest payments from the time of the contract until approximately 12 months later. She stated that she received approximately \$12,000 in interest payments.
- 96. When the interest payments stopped, Ms. Andrews called Mr. Cicerelli. He stated that he had to put his father in the hospital, and that Easy Money was going to file for bankruptcy.
- 97. Ms. Andrews testified that she was upset and called her friend, Ms. Hart. Ms. Andrews stated that Ms. Hart sounded shocked and that Ms. Hart said she did not know anything about the possible bankruptcy of Easy Money. When Ms. Andrews asked Ms. Hart about Mr. Nab, Ms. Hart indicated that Mr. Nab had received a refund of his money as he needed money to assist his ailing father who was in the hospital.
- 98. Ms. Andrews testified that she never knew Ms. Hart received a commission on her investment.

DECISION NO.

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- 99. On cross-examination, Ms. Andrews admitted that it was Ms. Hart who gave her the financial statements from Easy Money.
 - 100. Ms. Andrews also testified that her accountant told her this was a risky proposition.
- Ms. Andrews stated that she thought a return of 30 percent per year was tremendously 101. excessive and that she was afraid of it, but because of her friends, whom she truly trusted, she decided to invest her money in Easy Money.
- The Division also called Mark Klamrzynski, who is a senior forensic accountant with 102. the Securities Division of the Commission.
- Mr. Klamrzynski testified that the document entitled "Easy Money Auto Leasing 103. Gross Return Table" stated that "the above table will explain how we are able to pay our investors an excellent return on their investment and continue to function as a profitable business."
- Mr. Klamrzynski testified that the table was misleading. He stated that Easy Money was using gross revenue in calculating the return. He stated that a typical accounting calculation or any investment calculation for a return would use net income. He further testified that net income is gross sales or gross revenues minus expenses. He stated that using gross profit as a measure to calculate returns is misleading because a business can have a large gross profit, but still be unprofitable.
- Mr. Klamrzynski also testified that, in his experience, he would expect to see some 105. disclosures in the document regarding sales, preferably some historical information. He also stated that if a company is new, then that information would be presented in a projection-type format, and the company would base its estimates on some legitimate facts. He stated that nothing in the table regarding Easy Money indicates any sort of historical or pro forma data.
- Mr. Klamrzynski then stated that during his investigation, he obtained the bank 106. records from Valley First Community Bank for eight different bank accounts. The bank accounts were titled as follows: Easy Money Auto Leasing, Easy Money Auto Leasing, Inc., Nationwide Financial Services, United Auto Finance, James Cicerelli and Tambi Lee Cicerelli, Superior Financial Services and two accounts under the same name, TLC Enterprises, Inc., d/b/a Commercial Enterprises.

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- Mr. Klamrzynski testified that Mr. Cicerelli was the signatory on all of the accounts, except for Superior Financial Services. He testified that the signator on that account was David French.
- 108. Mr. Klamrzynski testified that excluding the Superior Financial Account. Mr. Cicerelli signed the majority of the checks drawn upon the accounts he examined.
- Mr. Klamrzynski testified that his analysis in this matter is incomplete because he does not have all of the bank records from Valley First Community Bank. He testified that, based on his experience, he believes there could be as much as approximately \$300,000 deposited into those accounts that are unaccounted for, and that makes up approximately 21 percent of the investments in this case.
- 110. Mr. Klamrzynski testified that there were numerous transfers of money between all of the accounts.
- He testified that from October 26, 1998 through August 8, 2001, the majority of the 111. money deposited into these accounts came from investors. He testified that approximately \$1,343,000 of the \$2,280,000 deposited into those eight accounts came from individual investors. He stated that Mr. Cicerelli, Tambi Lee Stephenson or David French deposited the investors' money into those accounts.
- Mr. Klamrzynski testified that in his analysis, Easy Money had gross revenue of 112. approximately \$316,000 and approximately \$313,000 in expenses, for a net income of approximately \$3,000.
- Mr. Klamrzynski stated that over \$517,000 was disbursed from Respondents to the 113. investors.
- He further testified that, in his opinion, the only source of funds to repay investors the 114. interest they were promised was from other investor money.
- He further testified that Easy Money fit the definition of a Ponzi scheme. He stated that a Ponzi scheme is a fraudulent-type activity whereby investors think they are investing in a viable business and that their returns are being paid as a result of the business. However, the Ponzi scheme does not pay returns out of a viable business because the business does not exist or is merely

a facade. Investors are paid a return out of new investor money that is raised. 2

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Mr. Klamrzynski testified that one investor, Margaret Peirson, made out a \$50,000 check to SFS and that the check was cashed by Mr. French. He stated that Mr. French did not deposit the entire \$50,000 into the SFS account, but took \$5,000 of cash out. Mr. French deposited \$45,000 into the SFS account. On the same day of the deposit, Mr. French wrote himself a check in the amount of \$2,000. Mr. Klamrzynski said that prior to the \$45,000 deposit into the SFS account, the account only had \$946 in it. Therefore, without the deposit, Mr. French could not have written himself a check for \$2,000. Mr. Klamrzynski testified that a few days later, Mr. French wrote a

Mr. Klamrzynski stated that the \$25,000 check from SFS to Easy Money was deposited by James Cicerelli. However, Mr. Cicerelli only deposited \$19,000 as he received \$6,000 in cash at the time of the deposit.

\$2,000 check on the SFS account to World Travel. He further stated that on that same day, he wrote

a check to Easy Money for the amount of \$25,000 and on the memo statement, it said "loan."

- Mr. Klamrzynski testified that Mr. Cicerelli had taken cash out from other investors checks in this manner at least ten other times. Mr. Klamrzynski stated that most of the cash withdrawals made by Mr. Cicerelli were for less than \$1,000.
- Mr. Klamrzynski stated that he believed over \$540,000 of the investors' money was disbursed either to Mr. Cicerelli, Mr. French or related entities that were controlled by Mr. Cicerelli or Mr. French.
- The Division also called Ronald Clark, who is the chief investigator for the Securities 120. Division of the Commission.
- Mr. Clark testified that Easy Money had not filed with the Commission as a seller of securities, as an issuer of securities or as a securities sales entity.
- He further testified that SFS had not registered with the Commission as a licensed 122. securities dealer.
- Evidence at the hearing also indicated that neither Easy Money nor SFS had registered 123. any securities with the Commission.
 - Mr. Clark testified that neither James Cicerelli or David French were registered to sell 124.

securities in Arizona, nor were they registered securities brokers.

- 125. Mr. Clark testified that the Articles of Incorporation of Easy Money indicated that it was established on November 23, 1998, in Nevada. It listed officers of James Cicerelli as President, David French as Secretary, James Cicerelli as Treasurer and David French as a Director. He testified that the document was signed by Mr. Cicerelli as President. He further stated that the list of officers was amended on February 19, 1999 to include James Cicerelli as President, David French as Secretary, James Cicerelli as Treasurer and Chris Pedford, Bonnie A. Hart and Louise Hoffacker as Directors. That document was also signed by Mr. Cicerelli.
- 126. Mr. Clark stated that SFS was never authorized to do business in Arizona. Evidence was produced at the hearing that showed SFS was never incorporated.
- 127. Mr. Clark testified that based on his calculations, the actual sum of money invested by investors with Easy Money and SFS was \$1,401,625.78.⁵
- 128. Mr. Clark testified that the investors received \$517,525 in the form of interest payments.
- 129. Mr. Clark testified that he had conversations with Mr. French and Mr. Cicerelli in an undercover investigation. During those conversations, Mr. French represented himself as a stockbroker and told Mr. Clark about a program called Easy Money in which the investors made an average of 30 percent on their money. When Mr. Clark asked over what period of time, Mr. French responded "immediately, they got paid immediately."
- 130. Mr. Clark testified that when Mr. French indicated that he was part of a successful operation called Easy Money, Mr. French neglected to tell him that Easy Money had filed bankruptcy two months earlier.
- 131. Mr. Clark testified that in his investigation, he learned that Mr. French was neither a stockbroker, nor did he have a brokerage firm.
- 132. Mr. Clark testified that Mr. French offered him several other investment opportunities, including a business which made ornaments of granite which supposedly came from Mt. Sinai; a

⁵ Ms. Peirson's \$70,000 investment was the only investment made with SFS.

transmission rebuilding business; and a business which provided discount medical coverage to people who were subscribers.

- 133. Mr. Clark testified that Mr. French and Mr. Cicerelli promised a return of approximately 2 percent a month or 24 percent a year on Mr. Clark's investment.
- 134. Mr. Clark testified that Mr. Cicerelli and Mr. French did not ask about Mr. Clark's investment history, nor did they discuss the risks inherent in investing in these opportunities. Further, they understood that Mr. Clark would only be a passive investor.
- 135. After conversations with Mr. French and Mr. Cicerelli, Mr. Clark testified he received a partnership agreement from Mr. Cicerelli and SFS. The agreement basically stated that Mr. Clark was to provide capital and that he would receive interest payments that would give him a return of approximately 24 percent over the course of the year.
- 136. Mr. Clark testified that when researching Mr. French's background, he found that Mr. French had a criminal record. Mr. Clark stated Mr. French has a felony conviction for making false statements to the United States Government. Mr. Clark stated that the underlying facts of the conviction were that Mr. French applied for a passport under a false name.
- 137. Mr. Clark testified he was never informed of the conviction by either Mr. Cicerelli or Mr. French.
- 138. Mr. Clark testified that in his discussions with investors, the investors indicated to him that they were not aware of Mr. French's conviction.
- 139. Mr. Hoffacker, Ms. Peirson and Ms. Andrews all stated during their testimony that if they had been aware of Mr. French's felony conviction, that would have affected their decision to invest with Easy Money and SFS.
- 140. Mr. Clark indicated that, with the exception of Bonnie Hart and Robert Hoffacker, the other individuals who invested money with Easy Money or SFS, did not work for either Easy Money or SFS and were only passive investors.
- 141. Based on the evidence, the agreements entered into between Respondents and the investors are investment contracts and/or promissory notes, which are securities under the Act.
 - 142. Based on the evidence, the investors in this case invested money in a common

| enterprise, | either with E | asy Money | or SFS, | with the | expectation | of profits to | be derived | substantially |
|-------------|------------------|-----------|---------|----------|-------------|---------------|------------|---------------|
| from the ef | fforts of others | s. | | | | | | |

- 143. In the case of Easy Money, the invested money was placed in the control of Mr. Cicerelli and/or Mr. French and those funds were pooled under their management.
 - 144. In the case of SFS, the invested money was placed into Mr. French's control.
- 145. The investors had an expectation of profit based upon Mr. Cicerelli's and Mr. French's representation that Easy Money was operating as a successful business either through Easy Money or SFS.
- 146. The investors' expectation of profits were delineated in their investment contracts and/or promissory notes, usually promising a 30 percent return on their investment.
- 147. The investors relied on the efforts of Mr. Cicerelli and Mr. French to obtain the promised rate of return and, with the exception of Louise Hoffacker and Bonnie Hart, they did not participate in any of the business decisions by Respondents.
- 148. It is uncontested that the securities offered by Respondents were never registered as required by the Act.
- 149. Mr. Cicerelli and Mr. French solicited investments either through personal contact, telephone calls, letters or facsimiles.
- 150. Easy Money, SFS, Mr. Cicerelli and Mr. French collected more than \$1,400,000 from investors through payments made directly to Mr. Cicerelli, Mr. French or SFS.
- 151. Based on the evidence, Respondents offered and sold securities that were not properly registered.
- 152. It is uncontested that the Respondents were not registered as security dealer(s) or sales person(s) as required by the Act.
- 153. Respondents, during the course of their business operation, mislead investors by omitting material facts as follows:
 - (a) The criminal record of David French;
 - (b) Financial statements that accurately reflected the financial condition of Easy Money and SFS; and
 - (c) That some of the investor funds were used to pay for Mr. Cicerelli and Mr.

French's personal living expenses and pay interest to other investors.

- 154. Respondents, during the course of their business operations, made the following misrepresentations to investors:
 - (a) Respondents indicated that investor funds would only be used to purchase or lease vehicles:
 - (b) That Easy Money had an established and proven track record;
 - (c) That Easy Money had virtually no competition;
 - (d) That the investments were 100 percent secured and insured against loss; and
 - (e) Respondents issued materials to investors that used gross revenues, with no mention of expenses, to calculate the expected return on investors' money.
- 155. Mr. Cicerelli, Mr. French and SFS made the following misrepresentations to Mr. Clark:
 - (a) that Easy Money was successful;
 - (b) that Mr. French had previously been a stockbroker; and
 - (c) that Mr. French had operated his own firm offering fixed rate investments;
- 156. Mr. Cicerelli, Mr. French and SFS failed to disclose to Mr. Clark that Mr. French had previously been convicted of a felony.
- 157. The Division recommended joint and several fines totaling \$150,000 against the Respondents, and further recommended the Respondents be held responsible for restitution jointly and severally.
- 158. The evidence is clear that the Respondents received capital investments of approximately \$1.4 million from investors. Easy Money had a gross revenue of approximately \$316,000 and approximately \$313,000 in expenses for a net income of approximately \$3,000. Although Easy Money only made \$3,000, it disbursed approximately \$517,000 in the form of interest payments to investors. Over \$540,000 of the investors' money was disbursed to either Mr. Cicerelli, Mr. French or related entities who were controlled by Mr. Cicerelli or Mr. French. It is clear that Respondents were operating a Ponzi scheme, as the only source of funds available to Easy Money to pay over \$517,000 in the form of interest payments was new investor money raised by Respondents. Easy Money and the Respondents operated this Ponzi scheme over a one and a half year timeframe and their actions amounted to investors losing over \$880,000.
- 159. The actions by the Respondents are further exacerbated by the fact that while Easy Money was in bankruptcy, Mr. French and Mr. Cicerelli offered several other investment

| opportunities to an investigator of the Securities Division, who was acting in an under cover capacity |
|--|
| The terms and conditions offered by Mr. French and Mr. Clark regarding those opportunities were |
| very similar to the ones Mr. French and Mr. Cicerelli offered to the investors of Easy Money. |

- 160. In the case of Mr. French, his actions are further aggravated by the fact that he has a felony conviction, which he never disclosed to investors. In addition, his actions with regard to Ms. Margaret Peirson, as delineated above, amount to the creation of a second Ponzi scheme.
- 161. Based upon the facts and discussion herein, we find that a total penalty of \$430,000 and restitution of \$884,100.78 is appropriate in this matter.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

- 1. The Commission has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to Article XV of the Arizona Constitution and the Securities Act.
- 2. Respondents offered and sold securities within or from Arizona within the meaning of A.R.S. §§ 40-1801(15), 44-1801(21) and 44-1801(26).
- 3. Respondents violated A.R.S. § 44-1841 by offering or selling securities that were neither registered nor exempt from registration.
- 4. Respondents violated A.R.S. § 44-1842 by offering or selling securities while neither registered as a dealer or a salesman nor exempt from registration.
- 5. Respondents violated A.R.S. § 44-1991 by offering or selling securities within or from Arizona by (a) employing a device, scheme or artifice to defraud, (b) making untrue statements or misleading omissions of material facts, and (c) engaging in transactions, practices or courses of business which operate or would operate as a fraud or deceit.
- 6. Respondents' conduct is grounds for a cease and desist order pursuant to A.R.S. § 44-2032.
- 7. Respondents' conduct is grounds for an order of restitution pursuant to A.R.S. § 44-2132.
 - 8. Respondents' conduct is grounds for administrative penalties under A.R.S. § 44-2036.

ORDER

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that pursuant to the authority granted to the Commission

under A.R.S. § 44-2032, Respondents Easy Money Auto Leasing, Inc., Superior Financial Services, Inc., James Anthony Cicerelli and David Paul French shall cease and desist from actions described hereinabove in violation of A.R.S. §§ 44-1841, 44-1842 and 44-1991.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that pursuant to the authority granted to the Commission under A.R.S. § 44-2036, Respondent Easy Money Auto Leasing, Inc., shall pay as administrative penalties: for the violations of A.R.S. § 44-1841, the sum of \$5,000; for the violations of A.R.S. § 44-1842, the sum of \$5,000; and for the violations of A.R.S. § 44-1991; the sum of \$50,000.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that pursuant to the authority granted to the Commission under A.R.S. § 44-2036, Respondent James Anthony Cicerelli shall pay as administrative penalties: for the violations of A.R.S. § 44-1841, the sum of \$25,000; for the violations of A.R.S. § 44-1842, the sum of \$25,000; and for the violations of A.R.S. § 44-1991, the sum of \$100,000.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that pursuant to the authority granted to the Commission under A.R.S. § 44-2036, Respondents Superior Financial Services, Inc. and David Paul French shall, jointly and severally, pay as administrative penalties: for the violations of A.R.S. § 44-1841, the sum of \$25,000; for the violations of A.R.S. § 44-1842, the sum of \$25,000; and for the violations of A.R.S. § 44-1991, the sum of \$170,000.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the administrative penalties ordered hereinabove shall be made payable to the State Treasurer for deposit in the general fund for the State of Arizona.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the administrative penalties ordered hereinabove shall be bear an interest rate of 10 percent per year for any outstanding balance after 60 days from the effective date of this Decision.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that pursuant to authority granted to the Commission under A.R.S. § 44-2032, Respondents Easy Money Auto Leasing, Inc., Superior Financial Services, Inc. James Anthony Cicerelli and David Paul French, jointly and severally, shall make restitution in an amount not to exceed \$828,600.78, subject to any legal set-offs confirmed by the Director of Securities, and said restitution is to be made within 60 days of the effective date of this Decision.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that pursuant to authority granted to the Commission under A.R.S. § 44-2032, Respondents Superior Financial Services, Inc. and David Paul French, jointly and

severally, shall also make restitution in an amount not to exceed \$55,500 to Ms. Margaret Peirson, subject to any legal set-offs confirmed by the Director of Securities, and said restitution is to be made within 60 days of the effective date of this Decision. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the restitution ordered hereinabove shall bear an interest rate of 10 percent per year for the period from the dates of the investment to the date of payment of restitution by Respondents. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that all restitution payments ordered hereinabove shall be deposited into an interest bearing account(s) if appropriate, until distributions are made. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that any payments received from Easy Money Auto Leasing, Inc., Superior Financial Services, Inc. James Anthony Cicerelli or David Paul French will be first applied towards the balance of the restitution until it is paid in full. After the restitution in this matter is paid in full, then the payments made by Easy Money Auto Leasing, Inc., Superior Financial Services, Inc. James Anthony Cicerelli or David Paul French will be applied toward the administrative penalty in this matter.

DECISION NO

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| 2 | SERVICE LIST FOR: | EASY MONEY AUTO LEASING, INC. et al. | | | | | | |
| 3 | DOCKET NO. | S-03415A-01-0000 | | | | | | |
| 4 | Robert Suzenski | | | | | | | |
| 5 | ROBERT SUZENSKI, P.C. 2916 N. Seventh Avenue, Suite 100 | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Phoenix, Arizona 85013 | | | | | | | |
| 7 | James Cicerelli 13027 N. Surrey Circle | | | | | | | |
| 8 | Phoenix, AZ 85029 | | | | | | | |
| 9 | David Paul French 2102 E. Sharon Dr. | | | | | | | |
| 10 | Phoenix, Arizona 85022 | | | | | | | |
| 11 | Lothar Goernitz P.O. Box 32961 | | | | | | | |
| 12 | Phoenix, Arizona 85064-2961 Bankruptcy Trustee for Easy Money A | Auto Leasing, Inc. | | | | | | |
| 13 | James E. Cross | | | | | | | |
| 14 | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | Phoenix, Arizona 85067-6379 Attorney for the Bankruptcy Trustee | • | | | | | | |
| 16 | Moira McCarthy | | | | | | | |
| 17 | Assistant Attorney General ARIZONA ATTORNEY GENERAL'S | S OFFICE | | | | | | |
| 18 | 1275 West Washington Street Phoenix, Arizona 85007 | | | | | | | |
| 19 | W. Mark Sendrow, Director | | | | | | | |
| 20 | Securities Division ARIZONA CORPORATION COMM | ISSION | | | | | | |
| 21 | 1300 West Washington Street Phoenix, Arizona 85007 | | | | | | | |
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DECISION NO.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Easy Money Auto Leasing, Inc., Superior Financial Services, Inc. James Anthony Cicerelli and David Paul French shall contact the Securities Division by October 1, 2002, to establish a payment plan that delineates how they will repay the restitution and pay the administrative fee in the timeframe as described in this Decision. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this Decision shall become effective immediately. BY ORDER OF THE ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION. IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I, BRIAN C. McNEIL, Executive Secretary of the Arizona Corporation Commission, have hereunto set my hand and caused the official seal of the Commission to be affixed at the Capitol, in the City of Phoenix, this 29th day of AUGUST, 2002. **EXECUTIVE SECRETARY** DISSENT PJD:mli