1 AKERMAN LLP ELLEN S. ROBBINS (SBN 298044) 2 ellen.robbins@akerman.com **EVELINA GENTRY (SBN 296796)** 3 evelina.gentry@akerman.com 601 West Fifth Street, Suite 300 4 Los Angeles, California 90071 5 Telephone: (213) 688-9500 Facsimile: (213) 627-6342 6 MICHAEL D. NAPOLI (admitted pro hac vice) 7 michael.napoli@akerman.com 8 2001 Ross Avenue, Suite 3600 Dallas, Texas 75201 9 Telephone: (214) 720-4360 Facsimile: (214) 720-8116 10 Attorneys for Intervenors JOHN PERRY, 11 601 WEST FIFTH STREET, SUITE 300 LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90071 TEL (213) 688-9500 – FAX: (213) 627-6342 AND PAUL WOLANSKY 12 13 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 14 CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 15 16 SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE Case No. 2:18-cy-05008 COMMISSION, 17 INTERVENORS PERRY AND WOLANSKY'S NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION TO LIFT THE Plaintiff, 18 DECEMBER 21, 2018 STAY ORDER WITH RESPECT TO THE PENNY v. 19 RALPH IANNELLI and ESSEX LANE AND CENTRAL PARK 20 CAPITAL CORPORATION, **PROPERTIES** 21 Hearing Date: Defendants. January 23, 2020 Date: 22 Time: 10:00 a.m. Crtrm.: 6D 23 Judge: Hon. Fernando M. Olguin 24 25 26 27 28

INTERVENORS' NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION TO LIFT THE STAY ORDER

49884553;2

CASE No. 2:18-CV-5008

TO ALL INTERESTED PARTIES AND THEIR ATTORNEYS OF RECORD:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on January 23, 2020, at 10:00 a.m. in Courtroom 6D of the above-entitled Court located at 350 W. 1st Street, 6th Floor, Los Angeles, California 90012, Intervenors John Perry and Paul Wolansky ("Intervenors") will move for an order lifting the December 21, 2018, Order Regarding Preliminary Injunction and Appointment of a Permanent Receiver (the "Stay Order") to allow the Intervenors, who hold promissory notes secured by properties commonly known as 266 Penny Lane, Santa Barbara, CA 93108 ("Penny Lane Property") and 257 Central Park West, Apt. 4C, New York, NY 10024 (the "Co-Op," and together with the "Penny Lane Property," the "Properties"), to foreclose on the Properties and to credit bid to the full extent of the debt owed them by Defendant Ralph Iannelli. The Properties are not part of the Receivership Estate.

The notes secured by the Properties are currently in default, senior liens are accruing, and property taxes are unpaid; all of which is causing the value of the Properties to decline. The declining value of the Properties reduces the Intervenors' interests in the Properties.

This Motion is based upon this Notice, the attached Memorandum of Points and Authorities, and upon all papers and documents on file herein, the Court's files concerning this action, together with those facts and documents of which Intervenors request judicial notice and/or matters for which judicial notice is proper, as well as any oral argument that may be presented at the time of the hearing.

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This Motion is made following multiple attempts to informally resolve the issues addressed herein, as required by the Local Rule 7-3. *See* Declaration of Michael D. Napoli.

Dated: December 26, 2019

Respectfully submitted,

**AKERMAN LLP** 

By: /s/ Ellen S. Robbins
ELLEN S. ROBBINS
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JOHN PERRY, AND PAUL
WOLANSKY

A CASE NO. 2:18-CV-5008

INTERVENORS' NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION TO LIFT THE STAY ORDER

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INTERVENORS' NOTICE AND MOTION TO LIFT THE STAY ORDER

49884553;2

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## MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

### I. INTRODUCTION

Intervenors Perry and Wolansky hold notes payable by Defendant Ralph Iannelli secured by real property owned by Iannelli. The Penny Lane Property, a house owned by Iannelli, secures Perry's note. The Co-Op, a cooperative apartment that Iannelli owns in New York City, secures Wolansky's note. Both notes are in default. Although neither property is part of the receivership estate, the Court has frozen these properties preventing Perry and Wolansky from foreclosing.

The liens on each property exceed the property's fair market value. As a result, neither is available to satisfy the SEC's judgment against Iannelli or otherwise support the receivership. Accordingly, Perry and Wolansky request that the Court lift its freeze order so that they can foreclose on the Properties in accordance with appropriate state law.

# II. PERTINENT FACTUAL BACKGROUND

# A. Iannelli owes Wolansky more than \$2 million, which is partially secured by Iannelli's cooperative apartment in New York

Wolansky is an Essex Capital investor. <sup>1</sup> He entered into two limited partnership agreements with Essex – LGFJ, LP and LGFJ II, LP – in 2016 investing \$5 million. Declaration of Paul Wolansky ("Wolansky Decl.") at ¶¶ 3, 5. Under the limited partnership agreements, Essex was to combine Wolansky's funds with its own to acquire leases. *Id.* At the end of the lease terms, Wolansky was to receive a share of the profits. *Id.* Essex agreed to guaranty a minimum return to Wolansky by agreeing to buy-back Wolansky's limited partnership interest for an agreed sum. Essex agreed to buy-back Wolansky's interest in LGFJ for \$2,212,500 and his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Wolansky invested individually and through several family trusts − (a) the Trust f/b/o Sara Joe Wolansky, dated 1/27/2004; (b) the Trust f/b/o Natania Wolansky, dated 1/27/2004; and (c) the Trust f/b/o Samuel Wolansky, dated 1/27/2004. Wolansky Decl. at ¶ 2. For the sake of convenience, we will refer to these investors jointly as "Wolansky."

interest in LGFJ II for \$3,328,750. *Id.* Iannelli personally guaranteed Essex's repurchase obligation. *Id.* 

When the limited partnerships failed to return any profits, Wolansky exercised his right to require Essex to buy-back his interests. *Id.* at ¶ 4. Wolansky exercised his rights in LGFJ on December 15, 2017 with payment due on January 16, 2018. *Id.* He exercised his rights in LGFJ II on February 22, 2018 with payment due on March 20, 2018. *Id.* at ¶¶ 4, 6. Neither Essex not Iannelli timely complied with Essex's buy-back obligation. *Id.* 

After several months of negotiations and threats of litigation by Wolansky, Iannelli agreed to purchase Wolansky's interest in LGFJ for \$2 million.<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at ¶¶ 7, 8, Exh. A (Purchase Agreement). To pay for the LGFJ interests, Iannelli *and his wife, Melissa Ianelli, executed a note in favor of Wolansky for \$2 million. Id.* at ¶ 8. As security for the note, the Iannellis granted Wolansky a first lien on the Co-Op, a cooperative apartment that they own in New York, 257 Central Park West, Apt. 4C. *Id.*, Exhs. B (Note), C (Security Agreement). The Iannellis have not paid as required and the note is in default. The current amount owed on the note is at least \$2,249,178. *Id.* at ¶ 10

Because the Iannellis have defaulted on their note, Wolansky is entitled to foreclose on the Co-Op. However, because of the Court's order freezing Iannelli's assets and enjoining self-help by creditors, Wolansky cannot do so.

Neither the Receiver nor the SEC has an interest in the Co-Op. The Co-Op's current appraised market value is \$2,010,000, or \$139,178 less than what Iannelli owes Wolansky. *Id.* at ¶ 11, Exh. E. The appraisal assumes an ordinary course sale; rather than a foreclosure. Accordingly, the likely value of the Co-Op in foreclosure would be less.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Essex has paid \$1.45 million towards its \$3.3 million debt on LGFJ II. Wolansky Decl. at ¶¶ 12-14, Exh. F.

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# Iannelli owes Perry more than \$3 million, which is partially secured by Iannelli's house in California В.

Like Wolansky, Perry is also an Essex investor investing in notes issued by Essex.<sup>3</sup> Iannelli agreed to co-sign two notes owed to Perry. The first note at issue is dated December 16, 2017 for \$1.5 million bearing interest at a rate of 4.3% and the second is dated July 1, 2017 for \$1.5 million bearing interest at 8.5%. Declaration of John Perry ("Perry Decl.") at ¶¶ 3, 4, Exhs. A (Note 1), B (Note 2). Neither Iannelli nor Essex has paid any of the principal or interest owed on these notes. Both notes are in default. Id.

After repeated attempts by Perry to obtain payment including threats of litigation, Iannelli agreed to give Perry a lien on the Penny Lane Property, Iannelli's house in California. The lien secures both notes. *Id.* at ¶ 5, Exh. C (Deed of Trust).

Perry's lien is the third lien on the house. The first two liens are a mortgage and a home equity line of credit owed to Chase Bank. Id. at ¶¶ 6, 7, Exh. D (Chase Account statement). The total amount owed on the mortgage and HELOC is \$3,061,668 as of July 31, 2019. *Id.* The monthly interest and escrow payment for both Chase loans is \$14,235. According to an account statement that Iannelli provided, Iannelli has not paid either Chase loan since early 2019. Id. As of December 31, 2019, the total amount due on the mortgage and HELOC will be at least \$3,132,845. *Id.* at ¶ 8.

The Iannellis are in default on their notes to Perry entitling Perry to foreclose. Id. at ¶¶ 3, 4. However, because of the Court's order freezing Iannelli's assets and enjoining self-help by creditors, Perry cannot do so.

Neither the Receiver nor the SEC has an interest in the house. The house's current appraised market value is \$4,175,000. *Id.* at ¶ 9, Exh. E. (Appraisal). Taking into account the mortgage and HELOC, there is only \$1,143,807 in equity available

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Perry invested both individually and through his trust, the John H. Perry, III Revocable Trust. Perry Decl. at ¶ 2. For the sake of convenience, we will refer to these investors jointly as "Perry."

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to satisfy Iannelli's \$3+ million debt to Perry. The appraisal assumes an ordinary course sale; rather than a foreclosure. Accordingly, the likely value of the house in foreclosure would be less.

#### III. PERTINENT PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

On June 5, 2018, the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "SEC") filed a complaint against defendants Ralph Iannelli and Essex (the "Complaint"). ECF No. 1. The Complaint alleged that between 2014 and 2017, Iannelli utilized Essex to perpetrate an \$80 million offering fraud upon a group of approximately 70 lenders. Complaint, ¶ 4. The Complaint sought injunctive relief against Iannelli and Essex. Id. at  $\P$  8.

On July 26, 2018, the Intervenors Perry and Wolansky, among others, filed a Motion to Intervene and Appoint Monitor (the "Interveners' Motion"). ECF No. 32. On October 1, 2018, the Court granted the Interveners' Motion and allowed the Intervenors to intervene in this action "for the limited purpose of being heard on the topics of any asset freeze and any Receivership/monitor over Defendant Essex." Order Re Preliminary Injunction (ECF No. 53) at 1. At that time, the Court entered its first order freezing Iannelli's assets. Id. at 3-5.

On December 21, 2018, the Court entered the Stay Order. ECF No. 66. The Stay Order appointed Geoff Winkler as the Receiver for Essex. The Stay Order granted the Receiver full powers of an equity receiver over the defendant Essex. *Id.* The Stay Order also mandated the Receiver "to take such action as is necessary and appropriate to preserve and take control of and to prevent the dissipation, concealment, or disposition of any Assets." Id. The Stay Order did not, however, place either of the Properties under the Receiver's custody or control. Nor did the Court appoint a receiver for Iannelli.

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#### IV. **ARGUMENT**

#### The Court should lift the stay and allow Wolansky and Perry to Α. foreclose on the Properties.

A party in interest may file a motion for relief from stay with the court issuing the stay. Specifically, the Article XIV of the Stay Order provides that creditors and investors may seek leave of this court for relief from the blanket stay. ECF No. 66, at XIV, C. Additionally, the lifting of a stay is not extraordinary relief that is justified only under extreme circumstances; rather, the Court has wide latitude to determine that such relief is appropriate, on a case-by-case basis, based on a balancing of the equities.

Courts consider the following factors to determine whether the stay should be modified: (1) whether the moving party will suffer substantial injury if not permitted to proceed; (2) the time in the course of the receivership at which the motion for relief from the stay is made; and (3) the merit of the moving party's underlying claim. SEC v. Wencke, 622 F.2d 1363, 1374 (9th Cir. 1980). In the context of a security interest, the *Wencke* factors apply somewhat differently. There the operative questions are (i) whether the security interest is valid; (ii) whether there is equity in the property that would be available to the Receiver; and (iii) whether the receiver has had sufficient time to investigate the lien and property. SEC v. Madison Real Estate Group, LLC, 647 F. Supp. 2d 1271 (D. Utah 2009). Applying this test to the present case clearly weighs in favor of the Court granting the Intervenors relief from this Court's Stay Order.

#### Wolansky and Perry hold valid liens on the Properties 1.

Both Wolansky and Perry hold valid liens on their respective properties. Each has perfected his lien in accordance with state law. No party has to date challenged either lien. Both liens predate the Court's first freeze order in October 2018.

Wolansky holds a lien on the Co-Op in New York. Wolansky Decl. at ¶ 9, Exh. C (Security Agreement). Under New York law, ownership in a cooperative, cooperative interest is perfected by filing. N.Y. U.C.C. LAW § 9-310(d) (providing that "a security interest in a cooperative interest may be perfected only by filing a financing statement"). Wolansky filed a UCC-1 financing statement with a

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cooperative addendum as required by New York law. Wolansky Decl. at ¶ 9, Exh. D. Accordingly, he holds a valid lien perfected in accordance with law.

Perry holds a mortgage on the Penny Lane Property in California. Perry Decl. at ¶ 5, Exh. C (Deed of Trust). As required by California law, Perry recorded the deed of trust in the real property records of Santa Barbara County, California. *Id.* Accordingly, he holds a valid lien perfected in accordance with law.

such as that owned by Iannelli, is a "cooperative interest." A security interest in a

The imposition of the Receivership does not affect the liens held by Perry and Wolansky. To begin, neither the Penny Lane Property nor the Co-Op is a Both remain Iannelli's personal property outside of the receivership asset. Receiver's control. Thus, the Receiver has no claim to them. But, even if he did, the receivership does not limit or otherwise invalidate the liens. It is well established that "security interests in property are determined by state law and that a receiver appointed by a federal court takes property subject to all liens, priorities or privileges existing or accruing under the laws of the state." SEC v. Wells Fargo Bank, NA, 848 F.3d 1339, 1344 (11th Cir. 2017)(quoting Marshall v. New York, 254 U.S. 380, 385 (1920)).

Similarly, the SEC's judgment lien on the house is inferior to Perry's lien.<sup>5</sup> SEC v. Spongetech Delivery Sys., 98 F. Supp. 3d 530, 534-35 (E.D. N.Y. 2014). In

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Both New York and California law agree that New York law controls the attachment and perfection of a security interest in collateral located in New York. CAL. COM. CODE § 9301(2); N.Y. U.C.C. LAW § 9-301(e)("When collateral is a cooperative interest, the law of this state governs perfection, the effect of perfection or nonperfection, and the priority of the security interest in such collateral.").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> SEC has abstracted its judgment against Iannelli in Santa Barbara County creating a judgment lien on the Penny Lane Property. We do not know if the SEC has

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Spongetech, the court held that an SEC disgorgement judgment was inferior to a prior lien. The secured creditor provided proof that its lien had attached and been perfected in accordance with state law. In response, the SEC argued that the court should use its equitable power to subordinate the secured claim to its disgorgement judgement on behalf of the defrauded investors. After surveying the relevant case law, the *Spongetech* court held that the "Court's equitable authority, however, does not extend to abrogating property rights created by state law and protected by due process; equity follows the law." Id. at 537 (quoting SEC v. Haligiannis, 608 F. Supp.2d 444, 449 (S.D. N.Y. 2009) and citing *Hedges v. Dixon County*, 150 U.S. 182, 192 (1893)).

Here, Perry and Wolansky perfected their liens prior to the entry of the SEC's judgment and before the Court froze Iannelli's assets. In accordance with California law, Perry perfected his lien on the house by filing a deed of trust in the Santa Barbara County deed records. Wolanksy, in accordance with New York law, perfected his security interest in the Co-Op by filing a UCC-1 financing statement.

#### 2. The fair market values of the Properties are less than the liens on them and may decline further putting Perry and Wolansky at risk

Neither Property is part of the Receivership. As such, it provides no benefit to the estate and there is no advantage to the Receiver in retaining it. See Madison Real Estate Group, 647 F. Supp. 2d at 1284. In that case, the court reasoned that a receiver may retain property in the estate only so long as it is necessary to fulfill the function of the receivership and the advantages to the receiver outweigh the disadvantages to any secured creditor. In the ordinary case, this question turns on whether the value of the property exceeds the secured debt. *Id.* ("If the value of a property is less than the loan amount, however, the disadvantages of keeping the

attempted to do so in California. Nevertheless, this argument applies equally to Wolansky's lien on the Co-Op Apartment.

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property in the Receivership outweigh the advantages."). Here, the Properties are not even part of the estate.

Even if they were brought into the estate, the Properties create no value for the Receiver. The Properties are subject to multiple liens, accruing unpaid property taxes, and maintenance fees. Neither has sufficient value to cover all of the liens asserted against it. As a result, both Wolansky and Perry are under-secured. Further, each property has ongoing costs that are a priority over Wolansky and Perry's liens. Thus, Wolansky and Perry's insecurity increases month by month.

The Co-Op's current appraised market value is \$2,010,000. Wolansky Decl. at ¶ 11, Exh. E (Appraisal). Iannelli owes Wolansky \$2,249,178 secured by the Co-Op. Id. at ¶ 10. Further, the Co-Op is subject to maintenance fees charged by the cooperative corporation. These fees are \$3,590 per month. *Id.* at ¶ 11. While Wolansky understands that Iannelli has paid some of these fees, it is unlikely that Iannelli will continue to do so. As a general matter, maintenance fees have a priority over liens such as Wolansky's. Thus, the value of the Co-Op, already insufficient to cover the amounts owed to Wolansky, will decline further.

Penny Lane's current appraised market value is \$4,175,000. Perry Decl. at ¶ 9, Exh. E (Appraisal). Iannelli owes \$3,132,845 to Chase secured by its first two liens and \$3,314,289 to Perry. Id. at 3, 4, 8. Perry is, thus, under-secured by about \$2,272,134. Moreover, the Chase liens grow at a rate in excess of \$14,000 per month reducing the amount available to pay Perry's lien by that amount. *Id.* at  $\P$  6, 7.

Moreover, there is always a risk that the real estate markets in California and New York could decline further reducing the value of the Properties. To stem the current and potential losses, Wolansky and Perry need to be able to foreclose.

# The Receiver and SEC have had ample time to investigate the properties and Intervenors' liens 3.

The Court appointed the Receiver approximately one year ago. In the intervening twelve months, the Receiver has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars

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analyzing the books and records of Essex and Iannelli. To date he has applied for and been awarded \$542,000 in fees, much of which relates to forensic accounting. The Receiver has also incurred and been awarded \$286,000 in attorney's fees. See Order Granting First Interim Fee Application (ECF No. 98); Order Granting Second Interim Fee Application (ECF No. 112).

He has issued three reports summarizing his analysis concluding that he has "completed a preliminary, global accounting" reflecting among other things payments to and from Essex and investors, such as Wolansky and Perry. Second Interim Report (ECF No. 103) at 3. He further claims that he "can identify the amounts outstanding and owed by [Essex] to an overwhelming majority of [its] investors and creditors." Third Interim Report (ECF No. 123) at 11.

Moreover, the Receiver has specifically analyzed the transactions between and among Wolansky, Essex and Iannelli as well as those between and among Perry, Essex and Iannelli.<sup>6</sup> Perry and the Receiver have traded accountings and documents related to the amounts owed to Perry. In addition, Perry has provided documents supporting his investments in Essex to the Receiver. Perry Decl. at ¶ 11, Exh. F (Accounting and Reconciliation of Receiver's Accounting). Moreover, the Receiver has specifically told Wolansky that he has completed his accounting of Wolansky's transactions with Iannelli and Essex and concedes that Wolansky is owed money. Wolansky Decl. at ¶ 15.

The Receiver and SEC have had ample time to evaluate Wolansky and Perry's liens as well as the Properties. Accordingly, the Court should lift the Stay Order.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Even prior to his appointment during his service as monitor, the Receiver identified transactions involving Wolansky and Perry as worthy of particular attention. Monitor Report (ECF No. 60-1) at 18.

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#### B. The Court should set the amount of the liens so that Wolansky and Perry may credit bid.

In his report as monitor, the Receiver questioned the validity of the Wolansky and Perry's liens on the Properties. Monitor Report (ECF No. 60-1) at 18. Since March 2019, Wolansky and Perry have been discussing the debts owed to them by Essex and Iannelli as well as their liens on Iannelli's property with the Receiver. Wolansky and Perry have provided documents and accountings to the Receiver. They have also reconciled accountings provided by the Receiver. For his part, the Receiver has apparently completed his accounting. Despite these efforts, the Receiver has been unable or unwilling to take a position on the liens – pro or con.

Wolansky and Perry are in limbo. They are under-secured in properties whose available value is declining month by month as priority claims against the properties mount. In addition, they are subject to market risk.

Wolansky and Perry need to foreclose to preserve what little value remains. In order to protect their liens in a foreclosure process, they need to be able to credit bid. See River Rd. Hotel Partners, LLC v. Amalgamated Bank, 651 F.3d 642, 650-51 (7th Cir. 2011), aff'd sub nom. RadLAX Gateway Hotel, LLC v. Amalgamated Bank, 566 U.S. 639 (2012) (reasoning that the ability to credit bid "provides lenders with means to protect themselves from the risk that the winning auction bid will not capture the asset's actual value."); 7 also SEC v. Equity Build, Inc., 2019 WL 1953117, \*3, No. 18 CV 5587 (N.D. III. May 2, 2019)(allowing secured creditors to credit bid). But, they cannot do so as long as there are threatened but unresolved attacks on the validity or amount of their liens.

Wolansky holds a note from Iannelli for \$2 million that bears interest at 8.50% per year or \$465.75 per day beginning on June 22, 2018. Iannelli has paid nothing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> River Road Partners is a bankruptcy case. It is relevant, however, because this Court's local rules require that receiverships be administered in accordance with the practice in bankruptcy. L.R. 66-8. The *Equity Build* court has a similar rule.

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on the note. Wolansky is, therefore, owed \$2,249,178 – an amount that grows by \$465.75 per day.<sup>8</sup> Wolansky's note is secured by a perfected lien on the Co-Op.

Perry holds two notes owed by Iannelli totaling \$3 million. One for \$1.5 million bears interest at 4.30% and the other for \$1.5 million bears interest at 8.5%. Together the two notes bear interest at \$526.03 per day. Iannelli paid some interest but no principal on the notes. Considering his interest payments, Iannelli owes \$3,314,289 – an amount that grows by \$526.03 per day. Perry's notes are secured by a recorded deed of trust.<sup>9</sup>

The Court should, therefore, find that Wolansky and Perry's liens are valid and fix their value so that Wolansky and Perry can credit bid.

# V. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Intervenors respectfully request the Court to grant the relief from the Stay Order and allow them to foreclose and credit bid on the Properties.

Dated: December 26, 2019

Respectfully submitted,

# AKERMAN LLP

By: <u>/s/ Ellen S. Robbins</u> ELLEN S. ROBBINS Attorneys for Intervenors JOHN PERRY AND PAUL WOLANSKY

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The Receiver and SEC would presumably argue that the amount owed Wolansky should be measured by the difference between the amount that he invested and the amount that he received from Essex. While it should have no bearing on what Iannelli owes (as opposed to Wolansky's share in any distribution from Essex), that calculation shows that Wolansky is owed in excess of \$3.5 million. Wolansky Decl. at ¶ 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Using a net investment calculation for Perry shows that he is owed in excess of \$1.6 million. Perry Decl. at ¶ 11.