

*[As approved by the Legal Opinions Committee of the Business Law Section of the American Bar Association on September 14, 2018 and the Board of the Working Group on Legal Opinions Foundation on October 29, 2018, and distributed to other bar groups and interested parties for approval]*

## CORE OPINION PRINCIPLES

The following *Core Opinion Principles* are drawn from the *Statement of Opinion Practices*, \_\_\_ BUS. LAW. \_\_\_ ( ) (the “*Statement*”), and are intended to have the same meaning as the provisions of the *Statement* from which they are drawn. The *Statement*, which has been approved by the bar associations and other lawyer groups identified in Schedule I to the *Statement*, provides guidance regarding selected aspects of customary practice and other practices generally followed throughout the United States in the giving and receiving of closing opinions. In doing so, it amplifies the *Statement on the Role of Customary Practice in the Preparation and Understanding of Third-Party Legal Opinions*, 63 BUS. LAW. 1277 (Aug. 2008). The *Core Opinion Principles* are designed for use by opinion givers (both law firms and law departments of organizations) who wish to incorporate or attach to their opinion letters a more concise statement of some of the opinion principles included in the *Statement*.

## CORE OPINION PRINCIPLES

### 1. General

1.1 *Customary Practice.* Third-party legal opinion letters given at the closing of a business transaction (“closing opinions,” and the opinions included in them, “opinions”) by counsel for one party (the “opinion giver”) to another party (the “opinion recipient,” which term includes any other person the opinion giver expressly authorizes to rely on the closing opinion) are prepared and understood in accordance with the customary practice of lawyers who regularly give those opinions and lawyers who regularly review them for opinion recipients. The phrase “customary practice” refers principally to the work lawyers are expected to perform to give opinions and the way certain words and phrases commonly used in closing opinions are understood.

1.2 *Varying Application of Customary Practice.* The application of customary practice to a closing opinion or any particular opinion may be varied by a statement in the closing opinion or by an understanding with the opinion recipient or its counsel.

1.3 *Expression of Professional Judgment.* An opinion expresses the professional judgment of the opinion giver regarding the legal issues the opinion addresses. It is not a guarantee that a court will reach any particular result.

1.4 *Reliance by Recipients.* An opinion recipient is entitled to rely on an opinion, without taking any action to verify the opinion, unless it knows that the opinion is incorrect or unless its reliance on the opinion is otherwise unreasonable under the circumstances. An opinion recipient is entitled to expect an opinion giver, in giving an opinion, to exercise the diligence customarily exercised by lawyers who regularly give that opinion (unless varied as provided in §1.2).

1.5 *Good Faith.* An opinion giver and an opinion recipient and its counsel are each entitled to presume that the other is acting in good faith with respect to a closing opinion.

1.6 *Opinion Recipient and Customary Practice.* An opinion giver is entitled to presume that the opinion recipient is familiar with, or has obtained advice about, customary practice as it applies to the opinions it is receiving from the opinion giver.

1.7 *Only Matters Specifically Addressed.* A closing opinion covers only those matters it specifically addresses.

1.8 *Matters Beyond the Expertise of Lawyers.* Opinion givers should not be expected to give opinions on matters that are not within the expertise of lawyers (for example, financial statement analysis, economic forecasting and valuation). When an opinion depends on a matter not within the expertise of lawyers, an opinion giver may rely on information from an appropriate source or an express assumption with regard to the matter.

## 2. Facts and Assumptions

2.1 *Reliance on Factual Information and Use of Assumptions.* Because the lawyers preparing a closing opinion (the “opinion preparers”) typically will not have personal knowledge of all the facts they need to support the opinions being given, an opinion giver ordinarily is entitled to base those opinions on factual information provided by others, including its client, and on factual assumptions.

2.2 *Reliance on Facts Provided by Others.* An opinion giver is entitled to rely on factual information from an appropriate source unless the opinion preparers know that the information being relied on is incorrect or know of facts that they recognize make reliance under the circumstances otherwise unwarranted.

2.3 *Scope of Inquiry Regarding Factual Matters.* Opinion preparers are not expected to conduct an inquiry of other lawyers in their law firm or a review of the firm’s records to ascertain factual matters, except to the extent they recognize that a particular lawyer is reasonably likely to have or a particular record is reasonably likely to contain information not otherwise known to them that they need to give an opinion.

2.4 *Reliance on Representations That Are Legal Conclusions.* An opinion giver should not base an opinion on a representation that is tantamount to the legal conclusion the opinion expresses. An opinion giver may, however, rely on a legal conclusion in a certificate of an appropriate government official.

2.5 *Factual Assumptions.* Some factual assumptions on which opinions are based need to be stated expressly; others do not. Factual assumptions that ordinarily do not need to be stated expressly include assumptions of general application that apply regardless of the type of transaction or the nature of the parties. Examples are assumptions that (i) the documents reviewed are accurate,

complete and authentic, (ii) copies are identical to the originals, (iii) signatures are genuine, (iv) the parties to the transaction other than the opinion giver's client (or a non-client whose obligations are covered by the opinion) have the power and have taken the necessary action to enter into the transaction, and (v) the agreements those parties have entered into with the opinion giver's client (or the non-client) are enforceable against them. Stating expressly a particular assumption that could have been unstated does not imply the absence of other unstated assumptions.

### 3. Law

3.1 *Covered Law.* When a closing opinion states that an opinion covers the law of a specific jurisdiction or particular laws, the opinion covers no other law or laws.

3.2 *Applicable Law.* An opinion on the law of a jurisdiction covers only the law of that jurisdiction that lawyers practicing in the jurisdiction, exercising customary diligence, would reasonably recognize as being applicable to the client or the transaction that is the subject of the opinion. Even when recognized as being applicable, some laws (for example, securities, tax and insolvency laws) are not covered by a closing opinion. A closing opinion also does not cover municipal and other local law. An opinion may, however, cover law that would not otherwise be covered if the closing opinion does so expressly.

### 4. Miscellaneous

4.1 *Date.* A closing opinion speaks as of its date. An opinion giver has no obligation to update a closing opinion for events or legal developments occurring after its date.

4.2 *Reliance.* A closing opinion may be relied on only by its addressee and any other person the opinion giver expressly authorizes to rely.