

(the Act). Title III of the Act makes a number of amendments to the anti-money laundering provisions of the Bank Secrecy Act (BSA), which are codified in subchapter II of chapter 53 of title 31, United States Code. These amendments are intended to make it easier to prevent, detect, and prosecute international money laundering and the financing of terrorism. Section 352(a) of the Act, which became effective on April 24, 2002, amended section 5318(h) of the BSA. As amended, section 5318(h)(1) requires every financial institution to establish an anti-money laundering program that includes, at a minimum: (i) The development of internal policies, procedures, and controls; (ii) the designation of a compliance officer; (iii) an ongoing employee training program; and (iv) an independent audit function to test programs. When prescribing minimum standards for anti-money laundering programs, section 352 directs the Treasury to consider the extent to which such standards are commensurate with the size, location, and activities of the financial institutions to which such regulations apply.

As a "travel agency" is defined as a financial institution under the BSA, 31 U.S.C. 5312(a)(2)(Q), it is subject to the anti-money laundering program requirement. On April 29, 2002, FinCEN temporarily exempted certain financial institutions, including travel agencies, from the requirement to establish an anti-money laundering compliance program. The purpose of the deferral was to enable FinCEN to study the affected industries and consider to what extent anti-money laundering program requirements could best be applied, taking into account the specific characteristics of the various entities defined as financial institutions by the BSA.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, section 326 of the Act added new subsection (l) to 31 U.S.C. 5318, which requires Treasury to prescribe regulations setting forth minimum standards for financial institutions to identify customers applying to open accounts. Section 326 applies to all BSA financial institutions that open accounts for their customers.

FinCEN is proceeding with this ANPRM because of questions about travel agencies and money laundering that make it difficult to assess the benefits and burdens associated with imposition of anti-money laundering

regulations on this industry. Through this process, FinCEN hopes to solicit sufficient information to enable it to determine whether to go forward with a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, as well as the scope of entities and procedures that any such Notice should encompass.

## II. Issues for Comment

### 1. How Should a Travel Agency Be Defined? Should There Be a Minimum Threshold Value in the Definition?

Although the BSA identifies a travel agency as a financial institution, the statute contains no definition of the term, nor has FinCEN had an occasion to define the term in a regulation. Thus, the first step in addressing the appropriateness of issuing anti-money laundering regulations is determining a functional definition of a travel agency. The legislative history of the BSA provides no insight into how Congress intended the term to be defined.

As the name implies, a travel agency offers its services in the capacity of an agent, and not as a principal. A travel agency offers travel and tourism related services to the public as a result of agency agreements with airlines, cruise lines, hotels, and other suppliers of travel-related services. It may contract directly with suppliers such as hotels, car rental companies, and tour operators, or may contract with a coordinating body such as the Airlines Reporting Corporation (ARC)<sup>2</sup> and the International Airlines Travel Agency Network (IATAN). Travel agencies also may provide financial services such as traveler's checks to their customers, and may offer travel-related insurance. Travel agencies that offer such financial services in conjunction with travel services are considered financial institutions for the purpose of consumer privacy regulations.<sup>3</sup>

For purposes of this ANPRM, FinCEN is using the following functional definition of travel agency: "Any person who sells, as an agent and not as a principal, the following travel services: airline tickets, rail tickets, hotel and motel reservations, and cruise reservations, or some combination of those services." This definition excludes direct sales by service providers such as hotels and tour buses. These principals are excluded because

<sup>2</sup> ARC provides a mechanism that carriers may use to appoint travel agents, and such agents are then entitled to use ARC standard ticket stock for participating carriers, which comprise the vast majority of domestic and international carriers. ARC requires travel agents to obtain and maintain an irrevocable letter of credit as bond.

<sup>3</sup> See 16 CFR 313.3 (k)(2)(ix) (Federal Trade Commission regulations governing privacy of consumer information).

their inclusion appears to be at odds with the use of the term "agency" in the BSA definition (such entities are providers of travel-related services, rather than travel agents).

According to the Small Business Administration (SBA), most travel agencies are small businesses.<sup>4</sup> Of the 22,687 travel agencies identified by the SBA operating out of 29,332 establishments, only 450 fall outside the SBA definition of a small business in this industry. These larger businesses generate 47% of all industry revenue.<sup>5</sup> FinCEN's regulations in the past have recognized that businesses that do not transact in sufficient dollar amounts or volume may not present sufficient money laundering risk to require the imposition of federally mandated programs. For example, under the BSA, money services businesses other than money transmitters (currency exchangers and check cashers, as well as issuers, sellers, and redeemers of traveler's checks and money orders) are defined as financial institutions only if they transact over \$1,000 in covered transactions for any one person in any one day.<sup>6</sup> This threshold reflects the judgment that businesses that never engage in transactions above that level fail to present a money laundering risk sufficient to justify the regulatory burden. FinCEN solicits comment on whether, if travel agencies are required to implement anti-money laundering programs, there should be a monetary threshold of some kind in defining a travel agency for purposes of the BSA. Commenters should address whether any such threshold should be transaction based, as with the money services business rules, or on an annual gross income, or some other basis.

### 2. What Is the Potential Money Laundering Risk Posed By Travel Agencies? Are There Different Kinds of Travel Agencies or Different Services Offered That Pose Different Money Laundering Risks?

Although some travel agencies perform some of the functions of traditional financial institutions, such as selling traveler's checks, such agencies, to the extent they meet the regulatory threshold, would be considered money services businesses under 31 CFR part 103.11(uu)(4). The focus of this ANPRM is on the risks unique to travel agencies' provision of travel-related services. Within this focus, the industry does

<sup>4</sup> See 67 FR 38184 (May 31, 2002) (raising ceiling for defining a travel agency as a small business to \$3 million in total revenue, a definition encompassing 98% of travel agencies).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> 31 CFR 103.11(uu)(1)-(4).

<sup>1</sup> See 31 CFR 103.170, as codified by interim final rule published at 67 FR 21110 (April 29, 2002), as amended at 67 FR 67547 (November 6, 2002) and corrected at 67 FR 68935 (November 14, 2002).