OFFICE OF THE MISSISSIPPI SECRETARY OF STATE
CHARITIES DIVISION

IN THE MATTER OF:	)	
	)	
	)	
Benchmark Foundation	)	**Administrative Proceeding**
250 N Lehmberg Road	)	**Number: LC-22-5567**
Columbus, Mississippi 39702	)	
	)	
	)	
Respondent	)	

CEASE AND DESIST ORDER AND NOTICE OF INTENT
TO REVOKE REGISTRATION AND ADMINISTRATIVELY DISSOLVE

The SECRETARY OF STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, by and through the undersigned designated representative, hereby issues this Cease and Desist Order and Notice of Intent to Revoke Registration and Administratively Dissolve against Benchmark Foundation. In support hereof, he states the following:

I. JURISDICTION

The Secretary of State is vested with the regulation of charitable organizations that solicit donations in the State of Mississippi pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-501, *et seq.* Benchmark Foundation is a charitable organization as defined by Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-501(a)(i) ("Act"), to-wit:

> (A) Any person determined by the Internal Revenue Service to be a tax exempt organization pursuant to Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Benchmark Foundation is a charitable organization as defined by the Act, and is subject to the Secretary of State's regulatory authority. Therefore, the Secretary of State finds that he has jurisdiction over the subject matter and the parties herein.

II. FINDINGS OF FACT

1. On April 29, 2021, the Charities Division of the Secretary of State's Office ("Division") sent Benchmark Foundation a renewal registration notice informing it of the requirement to submit the annual renewal registration on or before May 15, 2021, its renewal date. The renewal notice was sent to the charity via electronic mail.

2. Failing to submit its renewal registration by May 31, 2021, Benchmark Foundation's registration expired. As a courtesy thereafter, the Division sent Benchmark Foundation a "termination letter" on May 31, 2021. The termination letter indicated that Benchmark Foundation had failed to renew its registration and that a renewal registration was required if Benchmark Foundation wanted to continue to solicit contributions in Mississippi; otherwise, if Benchmark Foundation wanted to cease solicitations in Mississippi, a Final Report would be required to terminate the registration. Benchmark Foundation failed to respond to the termination letter so the Division continued to send Benchmark Foundation termination letters via electronic mail on June 16, 2021 and July 2, 2021 giving it the ample opportunity to comply with state law.

3. Benchmark Foundation continuedly failed to respond to the termination letters.

4. To date, the Division has not received a renewal registration or Final Report from Benchmark Foundation.

III. APPLICABLE LAW

5. Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-503(1), every charitable organization which solicits or intends to solicit contributions shall be registered with the Secretary of State prior to any solicitation.

6. Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-503(6) further states that in no event shall a registered charitable organization continue to solicit contributions in or from this state after the date such organization should have filed, but failed to file, a renewal and the financial report in accordance with the requirements of §§79-11-501 through 79-11-529.

7. Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-503(8) also states that any registered charitable organization which for any reason opts not to renew its registration must, upon the expiration of its registration, provide to the Secretary of State a final report.

8. Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-509(1)(e) states that the Secretary of State shall deny, suspend, or revoke a registration or exemption if the applicant or registrant has violated or failed to comply with any provisions of the chapter or any rule or order thereunder.

9. Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-509(2) also states that the Secretary of State shall notify the applicant or licensee of his intent to deny, suspend, or revoke a license and shall inform him of his right to request an administrative hearing within thirty (30) days of receipt of the notification.

10. Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-509(4) provides that whenever it appears to the Secretary of State that any person has engaged in or is about to engage in any act or practice constituting a violation of any provision of this chapter or any rule or order hereunder, he may, in his discretion, seek one or more of the following remedies in addition to other remedies authorized by law:

(a) Issue a cease and desist order, with or without a prior hearing against the person or persons engaged in the prohibited activities, directing them to cease and desist from further illegal activity;

(b) Administratively dissolve the charitable organization; or

(c) Issue an order imposing an administrative penalty up to a maximum of Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars ($25,000.00) for each offense, each violation to be considered as a separate offense in a single proceeding or a series of related proceedings;

IV. CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

11. According to Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-503(1) and (6), every charitable organization which solicits or intends to solicit contributions shall file with the Secretary of State a registration statement and pay a filing fee of Fifty Dollars ($50.00). In no event shall a registered charitable organization continue to solicit contributions in or from this state after the date such organization should have filed, but failed to file, a renewal and the financial report in accordance with the requirements of §§79-11-501 through 79-11-529. Benchmark Foundation has failed to file a renewal registration and financial report with the Division after its registration expired, and is therefore in violation of these provisions.

12. Benchmark Foundation does not have the option of not renewing its registration in Mississippi. Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-503(8), if a registered charitable organization for any reason opts not to renew its registration, it must upon the expiration of its registration, provide to the Secretary of State a final report. Benchmark Foundation has failed to file a final report with the Division after its registration expired, and is therefore, in violation of this provision.

V. CEASE AND DESIST

As provided in Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-509(4), the Secretary of State hereby orders Benchmark Foundation to immediately **CEASE AND DESIST** soliciting charitable contributions in and from the State of Mississippi as defined by Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-501. This order shall remain in effect until further order of the Secretary of State.

VI. NOTICE OF INTENT TO REVOKE REGISTRATION AND ADMINISTRATIVELY DISSOLVE

Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-509(1)(e), the Secretary of State shall deny, suspend, or revoke a registration of a registrant that has violated or failed to comply with any provision of the chapter or rule thereunder. The Secretary of State hereby revokes the registration of Benchmark Foundation.

Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. §79-11-509(4)(b), the Secretary of State may administratively dissolve a charitable organization that has violated or failed to comply with any provision of the chapter or rule thereunder. The Secretary of State hereby administratively dissolves Benchmark Foundation.

VII. RIGHT TO ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING

An administrative hearing may be requested in this matter. Any such request shall be made, in writing, to Tanya G. Webber, Assistant Secretary of State, Charities Division, Post Office Box 136, Jackson, MS 39205, within thirty (30) days from the date of receipt of this Order. If an administrative hearing is requested, written notice of the date, time, and place, will be given to all parties by certified mail, return receipt requested. Said notice will also designate a Hearing Officer. In the event such written notice is not received within the thirty (30) day period of time, the registration revocation and dissolution shall become effective.

VIII. PUBLIC INTEREST

The actions taken and proposed to be taken herein by the Secretary of State are in the public interest and are consistent with the purposes set out in Miss. Code. Ann. §79-11-501, *et seq.*

IX. RIGHT TO AMEND

The Secretary of State hereby reserves the right to amend this Cease and Desist Order and Notice of Intent to Revoke Registration and Administratively Dissolve.

SO ISSUED, this the 26th day of August, 2022.

MICHAEL WATSON
Secretary of State
State of Mississippi

BY: _____
TANYA G. WEBBER
Assistant Secretary of State
Charities Division

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Tanya G. Webber, do hereby certify, that I have this day, mailed a true and correct copy, via certified mail, return receipt requested, of the Cease and Desist Order and Notice of Intent to Revoke Registration and Administratively Dissolve to the following:

Benchmark Foundation
250 N Lehmberg Road
Columbus, MS 39702

Gaye Jordan
Benchmark Foundation
Post Office Box 285
Tylertown, MS 38667

This the 26th day of August, 2022.

TANYA G. WEBBER
Assistant Secretary of State
Charities Division
Mississippi Secretary of State's Office

Tanya G. Webber, MSB# 99405
Mississippi Secretary of State's Office
Post Office Box 136
Jackson, Mississippi 39205
(601) 359-1599

Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE

Benchmark Foundation
250 N Lehmberg Road
Columbus, Mississippi 39702

October 12, 2022

RE: Benchmark Foundation's Status

CERTIFICATE OF ADMINISTRATIVE DISSOLUTION

The Mississippi Regulation of Charitable Solicitations Act ("Act") was revised in 2009 to modernize our charity regulation laws and to allow the Secretary of State's office to effectively enforce the Act and to allow remedies against the charitable organizations that violate provisions of the Act. Charitable organizations that fail to abide by the regulations are subject to administrative dissolution as prescribed in the Miss. Code Ann. Section 79-11-509(4)(b).

This notice is issued for **one or more** of the following reasons:

Benchmark Foundation has solicited within the State of Mississippi while unregistered and has repeatedly failed to respond to the Division's request for registration or termination of its registration.

THIS CERTIFICATE REPRESENTS THE OFFICIAL ADMINISTRATIVE DISSOLUTION

If your organization has any questions or concerns, please contact the Charities Division at (601) 359-1599. Our office is located at 125 South Congress Street, Jackson, Mississippi 39201.

Michael Watson

MICHAEL WATSON
Secretary of State
State of Mississippi