



News Release

DATE: August 18, 2006
CONTACT: Jeff Close, The SPARK Institute
860-658-5058

THE SPARK INSTITUTE FILES SEC COMMENT LETTER ON THE PROPOSED COLUMBIA FUNDS DISTRIBUTION PLAN

Simsbury, CT, August 18 - In an ongoing effort to affect this and future distribution plans, The SPARK Institute filed a comment letter with the Securities and Exchange Commission on Friday, August 18 in response to the proposed distribution plan for the Columbia Funds restitution payments.

“We have learned a great deal about the distribution process after filing our comment letter regarding the distribution plan for the Pilgrim Baxter funds. We are concerned about the fact that the distribution plans provide virtually no guidance or assistance with respect to the handling of retirement plans and retirement plan omnibus accounts.” said Larry Goldbrum, general counsel of The SPARK Institute. “The Independent Distribution Consultants (“IDC”) responsible for the distribution plans should modify the plans to address the concerns specific to retirement plans and retirement plan omnibus account holders, and provide more assistance with respect to such accounts.” Goldbrum added.

-more-

The growing concern among members of The SPARK Institute is the cost involved with the allocation of these restitution payments both at the plan level and the participant level. If retirement plan service providers are required to replicate the methodologies outlined in this and future plans in order to complete these allocations, the net proceeds to participants, the intended beneficiaries, could be severely diminished. “The methodologies being used in the distribution plans are very complex. To properly replicate them will be time consuming and costly. The IDCs have the ability to provide allocation options that are most cost effective for retirement plans which will ultimately preserve a greater portion of the proceeds for the ultimate beneficiaries” noted Goldbrum.

The SPARK Institute requested guidance and clarification on the following issues:

- the cost of applying the distribution plan methodology
- the time that will be allowed for providers to complete the distribution process
- the reimbursement for expense of completing the process

Goldbrum also noted, “The SPARK Institute may file a comment for each distribution plan that is released by the SEC. We are hopeful our continued input will translate into improved guidance developed by each IDC during the distribution plan development stage.”

For more details, you may request a copy of The SPARK Institute’s comment letter filed with the SEC today by contacting the Institute at 860-658-5058 or via the website at <http://www.sparkinstitute.org>.

The SPARK Institute is the leading voice in Washington for the retirement services industry. Through the combined expertise of its member companies, The SPARK Institute provides research, education, testimony and comments on pending legislative and regulatory issues to members of Congress and relevant government agency officials. This disciplined process and resulting solutions help shape America’s retirement future.

####