

Stellus Capital Investment Corp  
Form 10-K  
March 09, 2017

**UNITED STATES  
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20549**

**FORM 10-K**

x ANNUAL REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE  
SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934  
**For the fiscal year ended December 31, 2016**

**OR**

o TRANSITION REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE  
SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934  
**COMMISSION FILE NUMBER: 1-35730**

**STELLUS CAPITAL INVESTMENT CORPORATION**

**(Exact name of registrant as specified in its charter)**

Maryland  
(State of Incorporation)

46-0937320  
(I.R.S. Employer Identification Number)

4400 Post Oak Parkway, Suite 2200  
Houston, TX  
(Address of principal executive offices)

77027  
(Zip Code)

**Registrant's telephone number, including area code:  
(713) 292-5400**

**Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(b) of the  
Act:**

Title of Each Class	Name of Each Exchange on Which Registered
Common Stock, par value \$0.001 per share	New York Stock Exchange
6.50% Notes due 2019	New York Stock Exchange

**Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(g) of the  
Act:  
None**

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is a well-known seasoned issuer, as defined in Rule 405 of the Securities Act. Yes  No

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is not required to file reports pursuant to Section 13 or Section 15(d) of the Act. Yes  No

Indicate by check mark whether the Registrant (1) has filed all reports required to be filed by Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the Registrant was required to file such reports), and (2) has been subject to such filing requirements for the past 90 days. Yes  No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant has submitted electronically and posted on its corporate Web site, if any, every Interactive Data File required to be submitted and posted pursuant to Rule 405 of Regulation S-T (§232.405 of this chapter) during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to submit and post such files). Yes  No

Indicate by check mark if disclosure of delinquent filers pursuant to Item 405 of Regulation S-K is not contained herein, and will not be contained, to the best of Registrant's knowledge, in definitive proxy or information statements

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incorporated by reference in Part III of this Form 10-K or any amendment to this Form 10-K. o

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a large accelerated filer, an accelerated filer, a non-accelerated filer, or a smaller reporting company. See definition of accelerated filer, large accelerated filer and smaller reporting company in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act. (Check one):

Large accelerated filer

Accelerated filer

Non-accelerated filer

Smaller reporting company

(Do not check if a smaller reporting Company)

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a shell company (as defined in Rule 12b-2 of the Act). Yes  No

The aggregate market value of the Registrant's common stock held by non-affiliates of the Registrant as of June 30, 2016 was: \$127,794,778

There were 12,479,957 shares of the Registrant's common stock outstanding as of March 7, 2017.

## Documents Incorporated by Reference

Portions of the registrant's definitive Proxy Statement relating to the registrant's 2017 Annual Meeting of Stockholders, to be filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission within 120 days following the end of the Company's fiscal year, are incorporated by reference in Part III of this Annual Report on Form 10-K as indicated herein.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

**STELLUS CAPITAL INVESTMENT CORPORATION**

**FORM 10-K FOR THE FISCAL YEAR  
ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2016**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**PART I.**

ITEM 1.

1

BUSINESS

ITEM 1A.

29

RISK FACTORS

ITEM 1B.

57

UNRESOLVED STAFF COMMENTS

ITEM 2.

57

PROPERTIES

ITEM 3.

57

LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

ITEM 4.

57

MINE SAFETY DISCLOSURES

**PART II.**

ITEM 5.

58

MARKET FOR REGISTRANT'S COMMON EQUITY, RELATED STOCKHOLDER  
MATTERS AND ISSUER PURCHASES OF EQUITY SECURITIES

ITEM 6.

60

SELECTED FINANCIAL DATA

ITEM 7.

62

MANAGEMENT'S DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINANCIAL CONDITION AND  
RESULTS OF OPERATIONS

ITEM 7A.

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DISCLOSURES ABOUT MARKET

RISK

78

<u>ITEM 8.</u>	<u>79</u>
<u>FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND SUPPLEMENTARY DATA</u>	
<u>ITEM 9.</u>	<u>128</u>
<u>CHANGES IN AND DISAGREEMENTS WITH INDEPENDENT REGISTERED PUBLIC ACCOUNTING FIRM ON ACCOUNTING AND FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE</u>	
<u>ITEM 9A.</u>	<u>128</u>
<u>CONTROLS AND PROCEDURES</u>	
<u>ITEM 9B.</u>	<u>129</u>
<u>OTHER INFORMATION</u>	
<b>PART III</b>	
<u>ITEM 10.</u>	<u>130</u>
<u>DIRECTORS, EXECUTIVE OFFICERS AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE</u>	
<u>ITEMS 11.</u>	<u>130</u>
<u>EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION</u>	
<u>ITEM 12.</u>	<u>130</u>
<u>SECURITY OWNERSHIP OF CERTAIN BENEFICIAL OWNERS AND MANAGEMENT AND RELATED STOCKHOLDER MATTERS</u>	
<u>ITEM 13.</u>	<u>130</u>
<u>CERTAIN RELATIONSHIPS AND RELATED TRANSACTIONS AND DIRECTOR INDEPENDENCE</u>	
<u>ITEM 14.</u>	<u>130</u>
<u>PRINCIPAL ACCOUNTANT FEES AND SERVICES</u>	
<b>PART IV</b>	
<u>ITEM 15.</u>	<u>131</u>
<u>EXHIBITS, FINANCIAL STATEMENT SCHEDULES</u>	
<u>SIGNATURES</u>	<u>134</u>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PART I

### Item 1. Business

*Except as otherwise indicated, the terms we, us, our, and the Company refer to Stellus Capital Investment Corporation; and Stellus Capital Management refers to our investment adviser and administrator, Stellus Capital Management, LLC.*

#### General

We are an externally managed, closed-end, non-diversified management investment company that has elected to be regulated as a business development company, or BDC, under the Investment Company Act of 1940, or the 1940 Act.

We originate and invest primarily in private middle-market companies (typically those with \$5.0 million to \$50.0 million of EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization)) through first lien, second lien, unitranche and mezzanine debt financing, with corresponding equity co-investments. Unitranche debt is typically structured as first lien loans with certain risk characteristics of mezzanine debt. Mezzanine debt includes senior unsecured and subordinated loans.

Our investment activities are managed by our investment adviser, Stellus Capital Management, an investment advisory firm led by Robert T. Ladd and its other senior investment professionals. We source investments primarily through the extensive network of relationships that the senior investment professionals of Stellus Capital Management have developed with financial sponsor firms, financial institutions, middle-market companies, management teams and other professional intermediaries. The companies in which we invest are typically highly leveraged, and, in most cases, our investments in such companies will not be rated by national rating agencies. If such investments were rated, we believe that they would likely receive a rating which is often referred to as junk.

Our investment objective is to maximize the total return to our stockholders in the form of current income and capital appreciation. We seek to achieve our investment objective by:

accessing the extensive origination channels that have been developed and established by the Stellus Capital Management investment team that include long-standing relationships with private equity firms, commercial banks, investment banks and other financial services firms;

investing in what we believe to be companies with strong business fundamentals, generally within our core middle-market company focus;

focusing on a variety of industry sectors, including business services, energy, general industrial, government services, healthcare, software and specialty finance;

focusing primarily on directly originated transactions;

applying the disciplined underwriting standards that the Stellus Capital Management investment team has developed over their extensive investing careers; and

capitalizing upon the experience and resources of the Stellus Capital Management investment team to monitor our investments.

In addition, we received exemptive relief from the SEC to co-invest with investment funds managed by Stellus Capital Management where doing so is consistent with our investment strategy as well as applicable law (including the terms and conditions of the exemptive order issued by the SEC). Under the terms of the relief permitting us to co-invest with other funds managed by Stellus Capital Management, a required majority (as defined in Section 57(o) of the 1940 Act) of our independent directors must make certain conclusions in connection with a co-investment transaction,

including that (1) the terms of the proposed transaction, including the consideration to be paid, are reasonable and fair to us and our stockholders and do not involve overreaching of us or our stockholders on the part of any person concerned and (2) the transaction is consistent with the interests of our stockholders and is consistent with our investment objectives and strategies. We intend to co-invest, subject to the conditions included in the exemptive order we received from the SEC, with private credit funds managed by Stellus Capital Management that have an investment strategy that is identical to our investment strategy. We believe that such co-investments may afford us additional investment opportunities and an ability to achieve greater diversification.

1

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

As a BDC, we are required to comply with regulatory requirements, including limitations on our use of debt. We are permitted to, and expect to continue to, finance our investments through borrowings. However, as a BDC, we are only generally allowed to borrow amounts such that our asset coverage, as defined in the 1940 Act, equals at least 200% after such borrowing. The amount of leverage that we employ will depend on our assessment of market conditions and other factors at the time of any proposed borrowing, such as the maturity, covenant package and rate structure of the proposed borrowings, our ability to raise funds through the issuance of our securities and the risks of such borrowings within the context of our investment outlook. Ultimately, we only intend to use leverage if the expected returns from borrowing to make investments will exceed the cost of such borrowings.

We have elected and qualified to be treated for federal income tax purposes as a regulated investment company, or RIC, under Subchapter M of the Internal Revenue Code, or the Code. As a RIC, we generally will not have to pay corporate-level federal income taxes on any net ordinary income or capital gains that we distribute to our stockholders if we meet certain source-of-income, distribution and asset diversification requirements.

Our principal executive office is currently located at 4400 Post Oak Parkway, Suite 2200, Houston, TX 77027, and our telephone number is (713) 292-5400. We maintain a website on the Internet at [www.stelluscapital.com](http://www.stelluscapital.com) (under the *Public Investors* section). Information contained on our website is not incorporated by reference into this annual report on Form 10-K and you should not consider information contained on our website to be part of this annual report on Form 10-K.

## **SBIC License**

Our wholly owned subsidiary holds a license to operate as a small business investment company, or SBIC. Our wholly owned SBIC subsidiary's SBIC license allows it to obtain leverage by issuing SBA-guaranteed debentures up to a maximum of \$150 million under current SBIC regulations, subject to required capitalization of the SBIC subsidiary and other requirements. As of December 31, 2016, the SBIC subsidiary had \$32.5 million of regulatory capital as such term is defined by the SBA, and has received commitments from the SBA of \$65 million. As of December 31, 2016, the SBIC subsidiary had \$65 million of SBA-guaranteed debentures outstanding. The principal amount of SBA-guaranteed debentures is not required to be paid prior to maturity but may be prepaid at any time without penalty. The interest rate of SBA-guaranteed debentures is fixed at the time of issuance at a market-driven spread over U.S. Treasury Notes with ten-year maturities. We believe that the SBA-guaranteed debentures are an attractive source of debt capital.

We have received exemptive relief from the SEC to permit us to exclude the debt of our SBIC subsidiary guaranteed by the SBA from the definition of senior securities in the 200% asset coverage ratio we are required to maintain under the 1940 Act. This relief allows us increased flexibility under the 200% asset coverage test by allowing us to borrow up to \$97.5 million more under our current capitalization of the SBIC subsidiary than we would otherwise be able to borrow absent the receipt of this exemptive relief.

## **Portfolio Composition**

Our investments generally range in size from \$5 million to \$30 million, and we may also selectively invest in larger positions, and we generally expect that the size of our positions will increase in proportion to the size of our capital base. Pending such investments, we may reduce our outstanding indebtedness or invest in cash, cash equivalents, U.S. government securities and other high-quality debt investments with a maturity of one year or less. In the future, we may adjust opportunistically the percentage of our assets held in various types of loans, our principal loan sources and the industries to which we have greatest exposure, based on market conditions, the credit cycle, available financing



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and our desired risk/return profile.

2

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The following table provides a summary of our portfolio investments as of December 31, 2016:

	As of December 31, 2016 (\$ in millions)
Number of portfolio companies	45
Fair value <sup>(a)</sup>	\$ 365.6
Cost	\$ 362.2
% of portfolio at fair value first lien debt	31 %
% of portfolio at fair value second lien debt	45 %
% of portfolio at fair value mezzanine debt	19 %
% of portfolio at fair value equity	5 %
Weighted-average annual yield <sup>(b)</sup>	11.0 %

(a) As of December 31, 2016, \$266.1 million of our debt investments at fair value were at floating interest rates, which represented approximately 77% of our total portfolio of debt investments at fair value. As of December 31, 2016, \$80.6 million of our debt investments at fair value were at fixed interest rates, which represented approximately 23% of our total portfolio of debt investments at fair value.

(b) The weighted average yield on all of our debt investments as of December 31, 2016, was approximately 11.0%, of which approximately 10.5% was current cash interest. The weighted average yield of our debt investments is not the same as a return on investment for our stockholders but, rather, relates to a portion of our investment portfolio and is calculated before the payment of all of our and our subsidiaries fees and expenses. The weighted average yield was computed using the effective interest rates for all of our debt investments, which represents the interest rate on our debt investment restated as an interest rate payable annually in arrears and is computed including cash and payment in kind, or PIK interest, as well as accretion of original issue discount. There can be no assurance that the weighted average yield will remain at their current level.

### **Stellus Capital Management**

Stellus Capital Management manages our investment activities and is responsible for analyzing investment opportunities, conducting research and performing due diligence on potential investments, negotiating and structuring our investments, originating prospective investments and monitoring our investments and portfolio companies on an ongoing basis.

The senior investment professionals of Stellus Capital Management have an average of over 27 years of investing, corporate finance, restructuring, consulting and accounting experience and have worked together at several companies. The Stellus Capital Management investment team has a wide range of experience in middle-market investing, including originating, structuring and managing loans and debt securities through market cycles. The Stellus Capital Management investment team continues to provide investment sub-advisory services to the D. E. Shaw & co., L.P. and its associated investment funds (the D.E. Shaw group ) with respect to an approximately \$150 million investment portfolio (as of December 31, 2016) in middle-market companies pursuant to sub-advisory arrangements.

In addition to serving as our investment adviser and the sub-advisor to the D. E. Shaw group as noted above, Stellus Capital Management currently manages a private credit fund that has an investment strategy that is identical to our investment strategy and energy private equity funds. We received exemptive relief from the SEC to co-invest with investment funds managed by Stellus Capital Management (other than the D. E. Shaw group funds) where doing so is

consistent with our investment strategy as well as applicable law (including the terms and conditions of the exemptive order issued by the SEC). We believe that such co-investments may afford us additional investment opportunities and an ability to achieve greater diversification. We will not co-invest with the energy private equity funds, as the energy private equity funds focus on predominantly equity-related investments, and we focus on predominantly credit-related investments.

Stellus Capital Management is headquartered in Houston, Texas, and also maintains offices in the Washington, D.C. area and Charlotte, North Carolina.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **Market Opportunity**

We originate and invest primarily in private middle-market companies through first lien, second lien, unitranche and mezzanine debt financing, often times with a corresponding equity investment. We believe the environment for investing in middle-market companies is attractive for several reasons, including:

***Robust Demand for Debt Capital.*** We believe that private equity firms have significant committed but uncalled capital, a large portion of which is still available for investment in the United States. We expect the large amount of uninvested capital commitments will drive buyout activity over the next several years, which should, in turn, create lending opportunities for us. In addition to increased buyout activity, a high volume of senior secured and high yield debt was originated in the calendar years 2004 through 2007 and will come due in the near term and, accordingly, we believe that new financing opportunities will increase as many companies seek to refinance this indebtedness.

***Reduced Availability of Capital for Middle-Market Companies.*** We believe there are fewer providers of, and less capital available for financing to middle-market companies, as compared to the time period prior to the recent economic downturn. We believe that, as a result of that downturn, many financing providers have chosen to focus on large, liquid corporate loans and managing capital markets transactions rather than lending to middle-market businesses. In addition, we believe recent regulatory changes, including the adoption of the Dodd-Frank Act and the introduction of the international capital and liquidity requirements under the Basel III Accords, or Basel III, have caused banks to curtail their lending to middle-market-companies. As a result, we believe that less competition will facilitate higher quality deal flow and allow for greater selectivity throughout the investment process.

***Attractive Deal Pricing and Structures.*** We believe that the pricing of middle-market debt investments is higher, and the terms of such investments are more conservative, compared to larger liquid, public debt financings, due to the more limited universe of lenders as well as the highly negotiated nature of these financings. These transactions tend to offer stronger covenant packages, higher interest rates, lower leverage levels and better call protection compared to larger financings. In addition, middle-market loans typically offer other investor protections such as default penalties, lien protection, change of control provisions and information rights for lenders.

***Specialized Lending Requirements.*** Lending to middle-market companies requires in-depth diligence, credit expertise, restructuring experience and active portfolio management. We believe that several factors render many U.S. financial institutions ill-suited to lend to middle-market companies. For example, based on the experience of Stellus Capital Management's investment team, lending to middle-market companies in the United States (a) is generally more labor intensive than lending to larger companies due to the smaller size of each investment and the fragmented nature of the information available with respect to such companies, (b) requires specialized due diligence and underwriting capabilities, and (c) may also require more extensive ongoing monitoring by the lender. We believe that, through Stellus Capital Management, we have the experience and expertise to meet these specialized lending requirements.

### **Competitive Strengths**

We believe that the following competitive strengths will allow us to achieve positive returns for our investors:

***Experienced Investment Team.*** Through our investment adviser, Stellus Capital Management, we have access to the experience and expertise of the Stellus Capital Management investment team, including its senior investment professionals who have an average of over 27 years of investing, corporate finance, restructuring, consulting and accounting experience and have worked together at several companies. The Stellus Capital Management investment team has a wide range of experience in middle-market investing, including originating, structuring and managing

loans and debt securities through market cycles. We believe the members of Stellus Capital Management's investment team are proven and experienced, with extensive capabilities in leveraged credit investing, having participated in these markets for the predominant portion of their careers. We believe that the experience and demonstrated ability of the Stellus Capital Management investment team to complete transactions enhances the quantity and quality of investment opportunities available to us.

4

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

***Established, Rigorous Investment and Monitoring Process.*** The Stellus Capital Management investment team has developed an extensive review and credit analysis process. Each investment that is reviewed by Stellus Capital Management is brought through a structured, multi-stage approval process. In addition, Stellus Capital Management takes an active approach in monitoring all investments, including reviews of financial performance on at least a quarterly basis and regular discussions with management. Stellus Capital Management's investment and monitoring process and the depth and experience of its investment team should allow it to conduct the type of due diligence and monitoring that enables it to identify and evaluate risks and opportunities.

***Demonstrated Ability to Structure Investments Creatively.*** Stellus Capital Management has the expertise and ability to structure investments across all levels of a company's capital structure. Furthermore, we believe that current market conditions will allow us to structure attractively priced debt investments and may allow us to incorporate other return-enhancing mechanisms such as commitment fees, original issue discounts, early redemption premiums, payment-in-kind, or PIK, interest or some form of equity securities.

***Resources of Stellus Capital Management Platform.*** We have access to the resources and capabilities of Stellus Capital Management, which has 18 investment professionals, including Robert T. Ladd, Dean D. Angelo, Joshua T. Davis and Todd A. Overbergen, who are supported by six managing directors, two principals, two vice presidents and three analysts. These individuals have developed long-term relationships with middle-market companies, management teams, financial sponsors, lending institutions and deal intermediaries by providing flexible financing throughout the capital structure. We believe that these relationships provide us with a competitive advantage in identifying investment opportunities in our target market. We also expect to benefit from Stellus Capital Management's due diligence, credit analysis, origination and transaction execution experience and capabilities, including the support provided with respect to those functions by Mr. Huskinson, who serves as our chief financial officer and chief compliance officer, and his staff of eight finance and operations professionals.

## **Investment Strategy**

The Stellus Capital Management investment team employs an opportunistic and flexible investing approach, combined with strong risk management processes, which we believe will yield a highly diversified portfolio across companies, industries, and investment types. We seek direct origination opportunities of first lien, second lien, unitranche and mezzanine debt financing, often times with modest corresponding equity investments, in middle-market companies. We believe that businesses in this size range often have limited access to public financial markets, and will benefit from Stellus Capital Management's reliable lending partnership. Many financing providers have chosen to focus on large corporate clients and managing capital markets transactions rather than lending to middle-market businesses. Further, many financial institutions and traditional lenders are faced with constrained balance sheets and are requiring existing borrowers to reduce leverage.

With an average of over 27 years of investing, corporate finance, restructuring, consulting and accounting experience, the senior investment team of Stellus Capital Management has demonstrated investment expertise throughout the balance sheet and in a variety of situations, including financial sponsor buyouts, growth capital, debt refinancings, balance sheet recapitalizations, rescue financings, distressed opportunities, and acquisition financings. Our investment philosophy emphasizes capital preservation through superior credit selection and risk mitigation. We expect our portfolio to provide downside protection through conservative cash flow and asset coverage requirements, priority in the capital structure and information requirements. We also anticipate benefiting from equity participation through warrants and other equity instruments structured as part of our investments. This flexible approach enables Stellus Capital Management to respond to market conditions and offer customized lending solutions.

Stellus Capital Management invests across a wide range of industries with deep expertise in select verticals including, but not limited to, business services, retail, general industrial, government services, healthcare, software and specialty finance. Our typical transactions include providing financing for leveraged buyouts, acquisitions, recapitalizations, growth opportunities, rescue financings, distressed or turnaround situations and bridge loans. We seek to maintain a diversified portfolio of investments as a method to manage risk and capitalize on specific sector trends. In addition, we intend to co-invest with private credit funds

5

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

managed by Stellus Capital Management that have an identical investment strategy as us and where doing so is consistent with conditions of the exemptive order issued by the SEC.

Our objective is to act as the lead or largest investor in transactions, generally investing between \$5 million and \$30 million per transaction. We expect the average investment holding period to be between two and four years, depending upon portfolio company objectives and conditions in the capital markets.

We focus on middle-market companies with between \$5 million and \$50 million of EBITDA in a variety of industry sectors with positive long-term dynamics and dependable cash flows. We seek businesses with management teams with demonstrated track records and economic incentives in strong franchises and sustainable competitive advantages with dependable and predictable cash flows.

We employ leverage prudently and within the limitations of the applicable laws and regulations for BDCs. Any decision on our part to use leverage will depend upon our assessment of the attractiveness of available investment opportunities in relation to the costs and perceived risks of such leverage.

## **Transaction Sourcing**

As access to investment opportunities is highly relationship-driven, the senior investment team and other investment professionals of Stellus Capital Management spend considerable time developing and maintaining contacts with key deal sources, including private equity firms, investment banks and senior lenders. The senior investment team and other investment professionals of Stellus Capital Management have been actively investing in the middle-market for the past decade and have focused on extensive calling and marketing efforts via speaking engagements, sponsorships, industry events and referrals to broaden their relationship network. Existing relationships are constantly cultivated through transactional work and other personal contacts.

In addition to financial sponsors, Stellus Capital Management has developed a network of other deal sources, including:

management teams and entrepreneurs;  
portfolio companies of private equity firms;  
other investment firms that have similar strategies to Stellus Capital Management and are seeking co-investors;  
placement agents and investment banks representing financial sponsors and issuers;  
corporate operating advisers and other financial advisers; and  
consultants, attorneys and other service providers to middle-market companies and financial sponsors.

We believe that Stellus Capital Management's broad network of deal origination contacts will afford us with a continuous source of investment opportunities.

These origination relationships provide access not only to potential investment opportunities but also to market intelligence on trends across the credit markets. Since inception, Stellus Capital Management has completed financing transactions with more than 128 equity sponsors and completed multiple financing transactions with 29 of those equity sponsors.

We believe that, over the past decade, the senior investment team and other investment professionals of Stellus Capital Management have built a reputation as a thoughtful and disciplined provider of capital to middle-market companies and a preferred financing source for private equity sponsors and management teams. We believe these factors give Stellus Capital Management a competitive advantage in sourcing investment opportunities, which are put to use for



our benefit.

6

---

TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **Investment Structuring**

Stellus Capital Management believes that each investment has unique characteristics that must be considered, understood and analyzed. Stellus Capital Management structures investment terms based on the business, the credit profile, the outlook for the industry in which a potential portfolio company operates, the competitive landscape, the products or services which the company sells and the management team and ownership of the company, among other factors. Stellus Capital Management relies upon the analysis conducted and information gathered through the investment process to evaluate the appropriate structure for our investments.

We invest primarily in the debt securities of middle-market companies. Our investments typically carry a high level of cash pay interest and may incorporate other return-enhancing mechanisms such as commitment fees, original issue discounts, early redemption premiums, PIK interest and some form of equity participation, including preferred stock, common stock, warrants and other forms of equity participation. We expect that a typical debt investment in which we invest will have a term at origination of between five and seven years. We expect to hold most of our investments to maturity or repayment, but we may sell some of our investments earlier if a liquidity event occurs, such as a sale, recapitalization or worsening of the credit quality of the portfolio company.

Stellus Capital Management negotiates covenants in connection with debt investments that provide protection for us but allow appropriate flexibility for the portfolio company. Such covenants may include affirmative and negative covenants, default penalties, lien protection and change of control provisions. Stellus Capital Management requires comprehensive information rights including access to management, financial statements and budgets and, in some cases, membership on the board of directors or board of directors observation rights. Additionally, Stellus Capital Management generally requires financial covenants and terms that restrict an issuer's use of leverage and limitations on asset sales and capital expenditures.

## **Secured Debt**

Secured debt, including first lien, second lien and unitranche financing, has liens on the assets of the borrower that serve as collateral in support of the repayment of such loans.

*First Lien Debt.* First lien debt is structured with first-priority liens on the assets of the borrower that serve as collateral in support of the repayment of such loans. First lien loans may provide for moderate loan amortization in the early years of the loan, with the majority of the amortization deferred until loan maturity.

*Second Lien Debt.* Second lien debt is structured as junior, secured loans, with second priority liens on an issuer's assets. These loans typically provide for moderate loan amortization in the initial years of the loan, with the majority of the amortization deferred until loan maturity.

*Unitranche Debt.* Unitranche debt typically is structured as first lien loans with certain risk characteristics of second lien debt. Unitranche debt typically provides for moderate loan amortization in the initial years of the debt, with the majority of the principal payment deferred until loan maturity. Since unitranche debt generally allows the borrower to make a large lump sum payment of principal at the end of the loan term, there is a risk of loss if the borrower is unable to pay the lump sum or refinance the amount owed at maturity. In some cases, we will be the sole lender, or we together with our affiliates will be the sole lender, of unitranche debt, which can provide us with more influence interacting with a borrower in terms of monitoring and, if necessary, remediation in the event of underperformance.

## **Mezzanine Debt**

Mezzanine debt, including senior unsecured and subordinated loans, is not be secured by any collateral and is effectively subordinated to the borrower's secured indebtedness (to the extent of the collateral securing such indebtedness), including pursuant to one or more intercreditor agreements that we enter into with holders of a borrower's senior debt.

7

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

*Senior Unsecured Loans.* Senior unsecured loans are structured as loans that rank senior in right of payment to any of the borrower's unsecured indebtedness that is contractually subordinated to such loans. These loans generally provide for fixed interest rates and amortize evenly over the term of the loan. Senior unsecured loans are generally less volatile than subordinated loans due to their priority over subordinated loans.

*Subordinated Loans.* Subordinated loans are structured as unsecured, subordinated loans that provide for relatively high, fixed interest rates that provide us with significant current interest income. These loans typically have interest-only payments (often representing a combination of cash pay and PIK interest) in the early years, with amortization of principal deferred to maturity. Subordinated loans generally allow the borrower to make a large lump sum payment of principal at the end of the loan term, and there is a risk of loss if the borrower is unable to pay the lump sum or refinance the amount owed at maturity. Subordinated loans are generally more volatile than secured loans and senior unsecured loans and may involve a greater risk of loss of principal as compared to other types of loans. Subordinated loans often include a PIK feature, which effectively operates as negative amortization of loan principal, thereby increasing credit risk exposure over the life of the loan.

## **Equity Securities**

In connection with some of our debt investments, we may also invest in preferred or common stock or receive nominally priced warrants or options to buy an equity interest in the portfolio company. As a result, as a portfolio company appreciates in value, we may achieve additional investment return from this equity interest. We may structure such equity investments and warrants to include provisions protecting our rights as a minority-interest holder, as well as a put, or right to sell such securities back to the issuer, upon the occurrence of specified events. In many cases, we may also seek to obtain registration rights in connection with these equity interests, which may include demand and piggyback registration rights.

## **Investment Process**

Through the resources of Stellus Capital Management, we have access to significant research resources, experienced investment professionals, internal information systems and a credit analysis framework and investment process. Stellus Capital Management has designed a highly involved and interactive investment management process, which is the core of its culture and the basis for what we believe is a strong track record of investment returns. The investment process seeks to select only those investments which it believes have the most attractive risk/reward characteristics. The process involves several levels of review and is coordinated in an effort to identify risks in potential investments.

Stellus Capital Management applies its expertise to screen our investment opportunities as described below. This rigorous process, combined with our broad origination capabilities, has allowed the Stellus Capital Management team to be prudent in selecting opportunities in which to make an investment.

All potential investment opportunities undergo an initial informal review by Stellus Capital Management's investment professionals. Each potential investment opportunity that an investment professional determines merits consideration is presented and evaluated at a weekly meeting in which Stellus Capital Management's investment professionals discuss the merits and risks of a potential investment opportunity as well as the due diligence process and the pricing and structure. If Stellus Capital Management's investment professionals believe an investment opportunity merits further review, the deal team prepares and presents to the investment committee for initial review a prescreen memorandum that generally describes the potential transaction and includes a description of the risks, due diligence process and proposed structure and pricing for the proposed investment opportunity.

Prior to making an investment, Stellus Capital Management conducts rigorous diligence on each investment opportunity. In connection with its due diligence on a potential investment opportunity, Stellus Capital Management utilizes its internal diligence resources which include its internally developed credit analytical framework, subscriptions to third party research resources, discussions with industry experts, internal information sharing systems and the analytical expertise of its investment professionals. Stellus Capital Management typically reviews the company's historical financials; industry drivers and outlook,

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

competitive threats, customer concentration, asset coverage, projected financials and credit metrics; management background checks; and, if applicable, the track record and funding capabilities of the private equity sponsor.

Upon review of the prescreen memorandum, if the investment committee determines to proceed with the review of an investment opportunity, the deal team continues its diligence and deal structuring plans, and prepares a credit approval memorandum for review by the investment committee. The credit approval memorandum, updates the prescreen memorandum with more deal specific detail, including an update to the diligence process and any changes in the structure and pricing of the proposed investment. Upon unanimous approval by the investment committee of the proposed investment as presented in the credit approval memorandum, Stellus Capital Management's Chief Investment Officer reviews any amendments before finalizing and closing negotiations with the prospective portfolio company.

### **Investment Committee**

Each new investment opportunity is unanimously approved by Stellus Capital Management's investment committee. Follow-on investments in existing portfolio companies require the investment committee's approval beyond that obtained when the initial investment in the company was made. The purpose of Stellus Capital Management's investment committee is to evaluate and approve all of our investments, subject at all times to the oversight and approval of our board of directors. The investment committee process is intended to bring the diverse experience and perspectives of the committee's members to the analysis and consideration of each investment. The investment committee consists of Robert T. Ladd, Dean D. Angelo, Joshua T. Davis, Todd A. Overbergen and W. Todd Huskinson. The investment committee serves to provide investment consistency and adherence to our core investment philosophy and policies. The investment committee also determines appropriate investment sizing and suggests ongoing monitoring requirements.

In addition to reviewing investments, investment committee meetings serve as a forum to discuss credit views and outlooks. Potential transactions and deal flow are reviewed on a regular basis. Members of the investment team are encouraged to share information and views on credits with the investment committee early in their analysis. We believe this process improves the quality of the analysis and assists the deal team members to work more efficiently.

Each transaction is presented to the investment committee in a formal written report. All of our new investments require unanimous approval by the investment committee. Each member of the investment committee performs a similar role for other accounts managed by Stellus Capital Management. In certain instances, including in connection with co-investments under our exemptive order, our board of directors may also determine that its approval is required prior to the making of an investment.

### **Monitoring Investments**

In most cases, we do not have board influence over portfolio companies. In some instances, Stellus Capital Management's investment professionals may obtain board representation or observation rights in conjunction with our investments. Stellus Capital Management takes an active approach in monitoring all investments, including reviews of financial performance on at least a quarterly basis and regular discussions with management. The monitoring process begins with structuring terms and conditions, which require the timely delivery and access to critical financial and business information on portfolio companies.

Specifically, Stellus Capital Management's monitoring system consists of the following activities:

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*Regular Investment Committee Updates.* Key portfolio company developments are discussed each week as part of the standard investment committee agenda.

*Written Reports.* The deal teams provide written updates as appropriate for key events that impact portfolio company performance or valuation. In addition, deal teams provide written updates following each portfolio company board meeting.

*Quarterly Full Portfolio Review.* Stellus Capital Management's Chief Investment Officer and our Chief Compliance Officer perform a quarterly comprehensive review of every portfolio company with the deal teams. This process includes a written performance and valuation update, and credit-specific discussion on

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

each of our portfolio companies. In addition, pursuant to our valuation policy, quarterly valuations are reviewed by our independent third party valuation firm.

As part of the monitoring process, Stellus Capital Management also tracks developments in the broader marketplace. Stellus Capital Management's investment professionals have a wealth of information on the competitive landscape, industry trends, relative valuation metrics, and analyses that assist in the execution of our investment strategy. In addition, Stellus Capital Management's extensive communications with brokers and dealers allows its investment professionals to monitor market and industry trends that could affect portfolio investments. Stellus Capital Management may provide ongoing strategic, financial and operational guidance to some portfolio companies either directly or by recommending its investment professionals or other experienced representatives to participate on the board of directors. Stellus Capital Management maintains an extensive network of strategic and operational advisers to call upon for industry expertise or to supplement existing management teams.

### **Asset Quality**

In addition to various risk management and monitoring tools, Stellus Capital Management uses an investment ranking system to characterize and monitor the credit profile and expected level of returns on each investment in our portfolio.

This investment ranking system uses a five-level numeric scale. The following is a description of the conditions associated with each investment category:

Investment Category 1 is used for investments that are performing above expectations, and whose risks remain favorable compared to the expected risk at the time of the original investment.

Investment Category 2 is used for investments that are performing within expectations and whose risks remain neutral compared to the expected risk at the time of the original investment. All new loans are initially rated 2.

Investment Category 3 is used for investments that are performing below expectations and that require closer monitoring, but where no loss of return or principal is expected. Portfolio companies with a rating of 3 may be out of compliance with financial covenants.

Investment Category 4 is used for investments that are performing substantially below expectations and whose risks have increased substantially since the original investment. These investments are often in work out. Investments with a rating of 4 are those for which some loss of contractual return but no loss of principal is expected.

Investment Category 5 is used for investments that are performing substantially below expectations and whose risks have increased substantially since the original investment. These investments are almost always in work out. Investments with a rating of 5 are those for which some loss of return and principal is expected.

In the event that Stellus Capital Management determines that an investment is underperforming, or circumstances suggest that the risk associated with a particular investment has significantly increased, Stellus Capital Management will increase its monitoring intensity and prepare regular updates for the investment committee, summarizing current operating results and material impending events and suggesting recommended actions. While the investment ranking system identifies the relative risk for each investment, the ranking alone does not dictate the scope and/or frequency of any monitoring that is performed. The frequency of Stellus Capital Management's monitoring of an investment is determined by a number of factors, including, but not limited to, the trends in the financial performance of the portfolio company, the investment structure and the type of collateral securing the investment.



## **Determination of Net Asset Value and Portfolio Valuation Process**

The net asset value per share of our outstanding shares of common stock is determined quarterly by dividing the value of total assets minus liabilities by the total number of shares outstanding.

In calculating the value of our total assets, investment transactions will be recorded on the trade date. Realized gains or losses will be computed using the specific identification method. Investments for which market quotations are readily available are valued at such market quotations. Debt and equity securities that are not publicly traded or whose market price is not readily available are valued at fair value as determined in

TABLE OF CONTENTS

good faith by our board of directors based on the input of our management and audit committee. In addition, our board of directors retains one or more independent valuation firms to review at least twice annually, the valuation of each portfolio investment for which a market quotation is not readily available. We also have adopted Accounting Standards Board Accounting Standards Codification 820, *Fair Value Measurements and Disclosures*, or ASC 820. This accounting statement requires us to assume that the portfolio investment is assumed to be sold in the principal market to market participants, or in the absence of a principal market, the most advantageous market, which may be a hypothetical market. Market participants are defined as buyers and sellers in the principal or most advantageous market that are independent, knowledgeable, and willing and able to transact. In accordance with ASC 820, the market in which we can exit portfolio investments with the greatest volume and level activity is considered our principal market.

A readily available market value is not expected to exist for most of the investments in our portfolio, and we value these portfolio investments at fair value as determined in good faith by our board of directors under our valuation policy and process. The types of factors that our board of directors may take into account in determining the fair value of our investments generally include, as appropriate, comparisons of financial ratios portfolio company to peer companies that are public, the nature and realizable value of any collateral, the portfolio company's ability to make payments and its earnings and discounted cash flow, the markets in which the portfolio company does business, and other relevant factors.

When an external event such as a purchase transaction, public offering or subsequent equity sale occurs, we consider the pricing indicated by the external event to corroborate our valuation. Due to the inherent uncertainty of determining the fair value of investments that do not have a readily available market value, the fair value of the investments may differ materially from the values that would have been used had a readily available market value existed for such investments. In addition, changes in the market environment and other events that may occur over the life of the investments may cause the gains or losses ultimately realized on these investments to be different from the valuations currently assigned.

With respect to investments for which market quotations are not readily available, our board of directors undertakes a multi-step valuation process each quarter, as described below:

our quarterly valuation process begins with each portfolio company or investment being initially valued by the investment professionals of Stellus Capital Management responsible for the portfolio investment; preliminary valuation conclusions are then documented and discussed with our senior management and Stellus Capital Management;

at least twice annually, the valuation for each portfolio investment is reviewed by an independent valuation firm; the audit committee of our board of directors then reviews these preliminary valuations and makes a recommendation to our board of directors; and

the board of directors then discusses the valuations and determines the fair value of each investment in our portfolio in good faith, based on the input of Stellus Capital Management, the independent valuation firm and the audit committee.

In following these approaches, the types of factors that are taken into account in fair value pricing our investments include, as relevant, but are not limited to:

- available current market data, including relevant and applicable market trading and transaction comparables;
- applicable market yields and multiples;
- security covenants;
- call protection provisions;
- information rights;



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

the nature and realizable value of any collateral;  
the portfolio company's ability to make payments, its earnings and discounted cash flows and the markets in which it does business;

comparisons of financial ratios of peer companies that are public;  
comparable merger and acquisition transactions; and  
the principal market and enterprise values.

### **Realization of Investments**

The potential exit scenarios of a portfolio company play an important role in evaluating investment decisions. As such, Stellus Capital Management formulates specific exit strategies at the time of investment. Our debt-orientation provides for increased potential exit opportunities, including (a) the sale of investments in the private markets, (b) the refinancing of investments held, often due to maturity or recapitalizations, and (c) other liquidity events including the sale or merger of the portfolio company. Since we seek to maintain a debt orientation in our investments, we expect to receive interest income over the course of the investment period, resulting in a significant return on invested capital well in advance of final exit.

### **Derivatives**

We may utilize hedging techniques such as interest rate swaps to mitigate potential interest rate risk on our indebtedness. Such interest rate swaps would principally be used to protect us against higher costs on our indebtedness resulting from increases in both short-term and long-term interest rates. We also may use various hedging and other risk management strategies to seek to manage various risks, including changes in currency exchange rates and market interest rates. Such hedging strategies would be utilized to seek to protect the value of our portfolio investments, for example, against possible adverse changes in the market value of securities held in our portfolio.

### **Managerial Assistance**

As a BDC, we offer, and must provide upon request, managerial assistance to our portfolio companies. This assistance could involve monitoring the operations of our portfolio companies, participating in board and management meetings, consulting with and advising officers of portfolio companies and providing other organizational and financial guidance. Stellus Capital Management or an affiliate of Stellus Capital Management provides such managerial assistance on our behalf to portfolio companies that request this assistance. We may receive fees for these services and will reimburse Stellus Capital Management or an affiliate of Stellus Capital Management for its allocated costs in providing such assistance, subject to the review by our board of directors, including our independent directors.

### **Competition**

Our primary competitors in providing financing to middle-market companies include public and private funds, other BDCs, commercial and investment banks, commercial financing companies and, to the extent they provide an alternative form of financing, private equity and hedge funds. Many of our competitors are substantially larger and have considerably greater financial, technical and marketing resources than we do. For example, we believe some competitors may have access to funding sources that are not available to us. In addition, some of our competitors may have higher risk tolerances or different risk assessments, which could allow them to consider a wider variety of investments and establish more relationships than us. Furthermore, many of our competitors are not subject to the regulatory restrictions that the 1940 Act imposes on us as a BDC or to the distribution and other requirements we must satisfy to maintain our qualification as a RIC.

We use the expertise of the investment professionals of Stellus Capital Management to which we have access to assess investment risks and determine appropriate pricing for our investments in portfolio companies. In addition, we believe that the relationships of the investment professionals of Stellus Capital Management enable us to learn about, and compete effectively for, financing opportunities with attractive middle-market companies in the industries in which we invest.

12

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **Employees**

We do not have any direct employees, and our day-to-day investment operations are managed by Stellus Capital Management. We have a chief executive officer and president and a chief financial officer and chief compliance officer. To the extent necessary, our board of directors may hire additional personnel going forward. Our officers are employees of Stellus Capital Management and our allocable portion of the cost of our chief financial officer and chief compliance officer and their respective staffs is paid by us pursuant to the administration agreement that we have entered into with Stellus Capital Management.

### **Management Agreements**

Stellus Capital Management serves as our investment adviser and is registered as an investment adviser under the Investment Advisers Act of 1940, as amended, or the Advisers Act. In addition, Stellus Capital Management serves as our administrator.

### **Investment Advisory Agreement**

Subject to the overall supervision of our board of directors and in accordance with the 1940 Act, Stellus Capital Management manages our day-to-day operations and provides investment advisory services to us. Under the terms of the investment advisory agreement, Stellus Capital Management:

determines the composition of our portfolio, the nature and timing of the changes to our portfolio and the manner of implementing such changes;

identifies, evaluates and negotiates the structure of the investments we make;

executes, closes, services and monitors the investments we make;

determines the securities and other assets that we purchase, retain or sell;

performs due diligence on prospective portfolio companies; and

provides us with such other investment advisory, research and related services as we may, from time to time, reasonably require for the investment of our funds.

Pursuant to the investment advisory agreement, we have agreed to pay Stellus Capital Management a fee for investment advisory and management services consisting of two components – a base management fee and an incentive fee. The cost of both the base management fee and the incentive fee are borne by our stockholders.

### **Management Fee**

The base management fee is calculated at an annual rate of 1.75% of our gross assets, including assets purchased with borrowed funds or other forms of leverage (including preferred stock, public and private debt issuances, derivative instruments, repurchase agreements and other similar instruments or arrangements) and excluding cash and cash equivalents. For services rendered under the investment advisory agreement, the base management fee is payable quarterly in arrears. The base management fee is calculated based on the average value of our gross assets, excluding cash and cash equivalents, at the end of the two most recently completed calendar quarters. Base management fees for any partial month or quarter are appropriately pro-rated.

## Incentive Fee

We pay Stellus Capital Management an incentive fee. Incentive fees are calculated as below and payable quarterly in arrears. The incentive fee, which provides Stellus Capital Management with a share of the income that it generates for us, has two components, ordinary income and capital gains, calculated as follows:

The ordinary income component is calculated and payable quarterly in arrears based on our pre-incentive fee net investment income for the immediately preceding calendar quarter, subject to a total return requirement, and deferral of non-cash amounts, and is 20.0% of the amount, if any, by which our pre-incentive fee net investment income, expressed as a rate of return on the value of our net assets attributable to our common stock, for the immediately preceding calendar quarter, exceeds a 2.0% (which is 8.0% annualized) hurdle rate and a catch-up provision measured as of the end of each calendar quarter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Under this provision, in any calendar quarter, Stellus Capital Management receives no incentive fee until our pre-incentive fee net investment income equals the hurdle rate of 2.0%, but then receives, as a catch-up, 100% of our pre-incentive fee net investment income with respect to that portion of such pre-incentive fee net investment income, if any, that exceeds the hurdle rate but is less than 2.5%.

The effect of the catch-up provision is that, subject to the total return provision discussed below, if pre-incentive fee net investment income exceeds 2.5% in any calendar quarter, Stellus Capital Management receives 20.0% of our pre-incentive fee net investment income as if a hurdle rate did not apply. For this purpose, pre-incentive fee net investment income means interest income, dividend income and any other income (including any other fees, such as commitment, origination, structuring, diligence, managerial assistance and consulting fees or other fees that we receive from portfolio companies) accrued during the calendar quarter, minus our operating expenses for the quarter (including the base management fee, expenses payable under the administration agreement (as described below), and any interest expense and any distributions paid on any issued and outstanding preferred stock, but excluding the incentive fee). Pre-incentive fee net investment income includes, in the case of investments with a deferred interest feature (such as original issue discount, debt instruments with PIK interest and zero coupon securities), accrued income that we have not yet received in cash. The foregoing incentive fee is subject to a total return requirement, which provides that no incentive fee in respect of the Company's pre-incentive fee net investment income will be payable except to the extent 20.0% of the cumulative net increase in net assets resulting from operations over the then current and 11 preceding quarters exceeds the cumulative incentive fees accrued and/or paid for the 11 preceding quarters. In other words, any ordinary income incentive fee that is payable in a calendar quarter will be limited to the lesser of (i) 20.0% of the amount by which our pre-incentive fee net investment income for such calendar quarter exceeds the 2.0% hurdle, subject to the catch-up provision, and (ii) (x) 20.0% of the cumulative net increase in net assets resulting from operations for the then current and 11 preceding calendar quarters *minus* (y) the cumulative incentive fees accrued and/or paid for the 11 preceding calendar quarters.

For the foregoing purpose, the cumulative net increase in net assets resulting from operations is the amount, if positive, of the sum of pre-incentive fee net investment income, realized gains and losses and unrealized appreciation and depreciation of the Company for the then current and 11 preceding calendar quarters. In addition, the portion of such incentive fee that is attributable to deferred interest (such as PIK interest or OID) will be paid to Stellus Capital Management, without any interest thereon, only if and to the extent we actually receive such interest in cash, and any accrual thereof will be reversed if and to the extent such interest is reversed in connection with any write-off or similar treatment of the investment giving rise to any deferred interest accrual. Any reversal of such amounts would reduce net income for the quarter by the net amount of the reversal (after taking into account the reversal of incentive fees payable) and would result in a reduction and possible elimination of the incentive fees for such quarter. There is no accumulation of amounts on the hurdle rate from quarter to quarter, and accordingly there is no clawback of amounts previously paid if subsequent quarters are below the quarterly hurdle, and there is no delay of payment if prior quarters are below the quarterly hurdle. Stellus Capital Management has agreed to permanently waive any interest accrued on the portion of the incentive fee attributable to deferred interest (such as PIK interest or OID).

Pre-incentive fee net investment income does not include any realized capital gains, realized capital losses or unrealized capital appreciation or depreciation. Because of the structure of the incentive fee, it is possible that we may pay an incentive fee in a quarter where we incur a loss, subject to the total return requirement. For example, if we receive pre-incentive fee net investment income in excess of the quarterly minimum hurdle rate, we will pay the applicable incentive fee even if we have incurred a loss in that quarter due to realized and unrealized capital losses. Our net investment income used to calculate this component of the incentive fee is also included in the amount of our gross assets used to calculate the 1.75% base management fee. These calculations are appropriately prorated for any period of less than three months and adjusted for any share issuances or repurchases during the current quarter.





TABLE OF CONTENTS

The following is a graphical representation of the calculation of the income-related portion of the incentive fee:

**Quarterly Incentive Fee Based on Net Investment  
Income  
Pre-Incentive Fee Net Investment Income  
(expressed as a percentage of the value of net assets)**

**Percentage of Pre-incentive Fee Net Investment  
Income  
Allocated to Income-Related Portion of Incentive Fee**

The capital gains component of the incentive fee is determined and payable in arrears as of the end of each calendar year (or upon termination of the investment advisory agreement, as of the termination date), is equal to 20.0% of our cumulative aggregate realized capital gains from inception through the end of that calendar year, computed net of our aggregate cumulative realized capital losses and our aggregate cumulative unrealized capital depreciation through the end of such year, less the aggregate amount of any previously paid capital gains incentive fees. If such amount is negative, then no capital gains incentive fee will be payable for such year. Additionally, if the investment advisory agreement is terminated as of a date that is not a calendar year end, the termination date will be treated as though it were a calendar year end for purposes of calculating and paying the capital gains incentive fee.

**Examples of Quarterly Incentive Fee Calculation**

**Example 1: Income Related Portion of Incentive Fee before Total  
Return Requirement Calculation:**

**Alternative 1**

**Assumptions**

Investment income (including interest, dividends, fees, etc.) = 1.25%  
Hurdle rate<sup>(1)</sup> = 2.0%  
Management fee<sup>(2)</sup> = 0.4375%  
Other expenses (legal, accounting, custodian, transfer agent, etc.) = 0.2%  
Pre-incentive fee net investment income  
(investment income (management fee + other expenses)) = 0.6125%

Pre-incentive fee net investment income does not exceed hurdle rate, therefore there is no income-related incentive fee.

## Alternative 2

### Assumptions

Investment income (including interest, dividends, fees, etc.) = 2.9%

Hurdle rate<sup>(1)</sup> = 2.0%

Management fee<sup>(2)</sup> = 0.4375%

Other expenses (legal, accounting, custodian, transfer agent, etc.) = 0.2%

Pre-incentive fee net investment income

(investment income (management fee + other expenses)) = 2.2625%

Incentive fee = 100% × Pre-incentive fee net investment income (subject to catch-up<sup>(3)</sup>)  
= 100% × (2.2625% - 2.0%)  
= 0.2625%

Pre-incentive fee net investment income exceeds the hurdle rate, but does not fully satisfy the catch-up provision, therefore the income related portion of the incentive fee is 0.2625%.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Alternative 3**

**Assumptions**

Investment income (including interest, dividends, fees, etc.)	= 3.5%
Hurdle rate <sup>(1)</sup>	= 2.0%
Management fee <sup>(2)</sup>	= 0.4375%
Other expenses (legal, accounting, custodian, transfer agent, etc.)	= 0.2%
Pre-incentive fee net investment income (investment income (management fee + other expenses))	= 2.8625%
Incentive fee = 100% × Pre-incentive fee net investment income (subject to catch-up <sup>(3)</sup> )	
Incentive fee = 100% × catch-up + (20.0% × (Pre-Incentive Fee Net Investment Income - 2.5%))	
Catch-up	= 2.5% - 2.0% = 0.5%
Incentive fee	= (100% × 0.5%) + (20.0% × (2.8625% - 2.5%)) = 0.5% + (20.0% × 0.3625%) = 0.5% + 0.0725% = 0.5725%

Pre-incentive fee net investment income exceeds the hurdle rate, and fully satisfies the catch-up provision, therefore the income related portion of the incentive fee is 0.5725%.

(1) Represents 8.0% annualized hurdle rate.

(2) Represents 1.75% annualized base management fee.

The catch-up provision is intended to provide Stellus Capital Management with an incentive fee of 20.0% on all (3)pre-incentive fee net investment income as if a hurdle rate did not apply when our net investment income exceeds 2.5% in any fiscal quarter.

**Example 2: Income Portion of Incentive Fee with Total Return Requirement Calculation:**

**Alternative 1:**

**Assumptions**

Investment income (including interest, dividends, fees, etc.)	= 3.5%
Hurdle rate <sup>(1)</sup>	= 2.0%
Management fee <sup>(2)</sup>	= 0.4375%
Other expenses (legal, accounting, custodian, transfer agent, etc.)	= 0.2%
Pre-incentive fee net investment income (investment income (management fee + other expenses))	= 2.8625%
Cumulative incentive compensation accrued and/or paid for preceding 11 calendar quarters	= \$9,000,000
20.0% of cumulative net increase in net assets resulting from operations over current and preceding 11 calendar quarters	= \$8,000,000

Although our pre-incentive fee net investment income exceeds the hurdle rate of 2.0% (as shown in Alternative 3 of Example 1 above), no incentive fee is payable because 20.0% of the cumulative net increase in net assets resulting from operations over the then current and 11 preceding calendar quarters did not exceed the cumulative income and capital gains incentive fees accrued and/or paid for the preceding 11 calendar quarters.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Alternative 2:**

**Assumptions**

Investment income (including interest, dividends, fees, etc.) = 3.5%

Hurdle rate<sup>(1)</sup> = 2.0%

Management fee<sup>(2)</sup> = 0.4375%

Other expenses (legal, accounting, custodian, transfer agent, etc.) = 0.2%

Pre-incentive fee net investment income

(investment income (management fee + other expenses) = 2.8625%

Cumulative incentive compensation accrued and/or paid for preceding 11 calendar quarters = \$9,000,000

20.0% of cumulative net increase in net assets resulting from operations over current and preceding 11 calendar quarters = \$10,000,000

Because our pre-incentive fee net investment income exceeds the hurdle rate of 2.0% and because 20.0% of the cumulative net increase in net assets resulting from operations over the then current and 11 preceding calendar quarters exceeds the cumulative income and capital gains incentive fees accrued and/or paid for the preceding 11 calendar quarters, an incentive fee would be payable, as shown in Alternative 3 of Example 1 above.

(1) Represents 8.0% annualized hurdle rate.

(2) Represents 1.75% annualized base management fee.

**Example 3: Capital Gains Portion of Incentive Fee(\*):**

**Alternative 1:**

**Assumptions**

Year 1: \$2.0 million investment made in Company A ( Investment A ), and \$3.0 million investment made in Company B ( Investment B )

Year 2: Investment A sold for \$5.0 million and fair market value ( FMV ) of Investment B determined to be \$3.5 million

Year 3: FMV of Investment B determined to be \$2.0 million

Year 4: Investment B sold for \$3.25 million

The capital gains portion of the incentive fee would be:

Year 1: None

Year 2: Capital gains incentive fee of \$0.6 million ( \$3.0 million realized capital gains on sale of Investment A multiplied by 20.0% )

Year 3: None \$0.4 million (20.0% multiplied by (\$3.0 million cumulative capital gains less \$1.0 million cumulative capital depreciation)) less \$0.6 million (previous capital gains fee paid in Year 2)

Year 4: Capital gains incentive fee of \$50,000 \$0.65 million (\$3.25 million cumulative realized capital gains multiplied by 20.0%) less \$0.6 million (capital gains incentive fee taken in Year 2)

## **Alternative 2**

### **Assumptions**

Year 1: \$2.0 million investment made in Company A ( Investment A ), \$5.25 million investment made in Company B ( Investment B ) and \$4.5 million investment made in Company C ( Investment C )

Year 2: Investment A sold for \$4.5 million, FMV of Investment B determined to be \$4.75 million and FMV of Investment C determined to be \$4.5 million

Year 3: FMV of Investment B determined to be \$5.0 million and Investment C sold for \$5.5 million

Year 4: FMV of Investment B determined to be \$6.0 million

Year 5: Investment B sold for \$4.0 million

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The capital gains incentive fee, if any, would be:

Year 1: None

Year 2: \$0.4 million capital gains incentive fee 20.0% multiplied by \$2.0 million (\$2.5 million realized capital gains on Investment A less \$0.5 million unrealized capital depreciation on Investment B)

Year 3: \$0.25 million capital gains incentive fee<sup>(1)</sup> \$0.65 million (20.0% multiplied by \$3.25 million (\$3.5 million cumulative realized capital gains less \$0.25 million unrealized capital depreciation)) less \$0.4 million capital gains incentive fee received in Year 2

Year 4: \$0.05 million capital gains incentive fee \$0.7 million (\$3.50 million cumulative realized capital gains multiplied by 20.0%) less \$0.65 million cumulative capital gains incentive fee paid in Year 2 and Year 3

Year 5: None \$0.45 million (20.0% multiplied by \$2.25 million (cumulative realized capital gains of \$3.5 million less realized capital losses of \$1.25 million)) less \$0.7 million cumulative capital gains incentive fee paid in Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4<sup>(2)</sup>

The hypothetical amounts of returns shown are based on a percentage of our total net assets and assume no leverage.

\*There is no guarantee that positive returns will be realized and actual returns may vary from those shown in this example.

As illustrated in Year 3 of Alternative 1 above, if a portfolio company were to be wound up on a date other than its (1) fiscal year end of any year, it may have paid aggregate capital gains incentive fees that are more than the amount of such fees that would be payable if such portfolio company had been wound up on its fiscal year end of such year.

As noted above, it is possible that the cumulative aggregate capital gains fee received by Stellus Capital (2) Management (\$0.70 million) is effectively greater than \$0.45 million (20.0% of cumulative aggregate realized capital gains less net realized capital losses or net unrealized depreciation (\$2.25 million)).

### **Payment of Our Expenses**

All investment professionals of Stellus Capital Management, when and to the extent engaged in providing investment advisory and management services to us, and the compensation and routine overhead expenses of personnel allocable to these services to us, are provided and paid for by Stellus Capital Management and not by us. We bear all other out-of-pocket costs and expenses of our operations and transactions, including, without limitation, those relating to:

organization and offering;

calculating our net asset value (including the cost and expenses of any independent valuation firm);

fees and expenses payable to third parties, including agents, consultants or other advisors, in monitoring financial and legal affairs for us and in monitoring our investments and performing due diligence on our prospective portfolio companies or otherwise relating to, or associated with, evaluating and making investments;

interest payable on debt, if any, incurred to finance our investments and expenses related to unsuccessful portfolio acquisition efforts;

offerings of our common stock and other securities;

base management and incentive fees;

administration fees and expenses, if any, payable under the administration agreement (including our allocable portion of Stellus Capital Management's overhead in performing its obligations under the administration agreement, including rent and the allocable portion of the cost of our chief compliance officer, chief financial officer and their respective



staffs);

transfer agent, dividend agent and custodial fees and expenses;  
U.S. federal and state registration fees;

18

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

all costs of registration and listing our shares on any securities exchange;  
U.S. federal, state and local taxes;  
independent directors' fees and expenses;  
costs of preparing and filing reports or other documents required by the SEC or other regulators;  
costs of any reports, proxy statements or other notices to stockholders, including printing costs;  
costs and fees associated with any fidelity bond, directors and officers/errors and omissions liability insurance, and any other insurance premiums;  
direct costs and expenses of administration, including printing, mailing, long distance telephone, copying, secretarial and other staff, independent auditors and outside legal costs;  
proxy voting expenses; and  
all other expenses incurred by us or Stellus Capital Management in connection with administering our business.

### **Duration and Termination**

Unless terminated earlier as described below, the investment advisory agreement will continue in effect from year to year if approved annually by our board of directors or by the affirmative vote of the holders of a majority of our outstanding voting securities, and, in either case, if also approved by a majority of our directors who are not interested persons. The investment advisory agreement automatically terminates in the event of its assignment, as defined in the 1940 Act, by Stellus Capital Management and may be terminated by either party without penalty upon 60 days' written notice to the other. The holders of a majority of our outstanding voting securities may also terminate the investment advisory agreement without penalty upon 60 days' written notice. See Item 1A. Risk Factors Risks Relating to our Business and Structure. We are dependent upon key personnel of Stellus Capital Management for our future success. If Stellus Capital Management were to lose any of its key personnel, our ability to achieve our investment objective could be significantly harmed.

### **Indemnification**

The investment advisory agreement provides that Stellus Capital Management and its officers, managers, partners, agents, employees, controlling persons and members, and any other person or entity affiliated with it, are entitled to indemnification from us for any damages, liabilities, costs and expenses (including reasonable attorneys' fees and amounts reasonably paid in settlement) arising from the rendering of Stellus Capital Management's services under the investment advisory agreement or otherwise as our investment adviser. Our obligation to provide indemnification under the investment advisory agreement, however, is limited by the 1940 Act and Investment Company Act Release No. 11330, which, among other things, prohibit us from indemnifying any director, officer or other individual from any liability resulting directly from the willful misconduct, bad faith, gross negligence in the performance of duties or reckless disregard of applicable obligations and duties of the directors, officers or other individuals and require us to set forth reasonable and fair means for determining whether indemnification shall be made.

### **Board Approval of the Investment Advisory Agreement**

Our board of directors, including a majority of our independent directors, approved the investment advisory agreement at its first meeting, held on September 24, 2012, which became effective in November 2012, and approved the annual continuation of the investment advisory agreement most recently at an in-person meeting in June 2016. In its consideration of the investment advisory agreement, the board of directors focused on information it had received relating to, among other things: (a) the nature, quality and extent of the advisory and other services to be provided to us by our investment adviser; (b) comparative data with respect to advisory fees or similar expenses paid by other BDCs with similar investment objectives; (c) our projected operating expenses and expense ratio compared to BDCs with similar investment objectives; (d) any existing and potential sources of indirect income to our investment adviser

from its relationships with us and the profitability of those relationships; (e) information about the services to be performed and the

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

personnel performing such services under the investment advisory agreement; (f) the organizational capability and financial condition of our investment adviser; and (g) various other factors. The board of directors did not rank or otherwise assign relative weights to the specific factors it considered in connection with its evaluation of the Investment Advisory Agreement, nor did it undertake to make any specific determination as to whether any particular factor, or any aspect of any particular factor, was favorable or unfavorable to the ultimate decision made by our board of directors. Rather, the board of directors based its approval of the Investment Advisory Agreement on the totality of information presented to it. In considering the factors discussed above, individual directors may have given different weights to different factors.

Based on the information reviewed and the discussions, the board of directors, including a majority of the non-interested directors, concluded that the investment management fee rates and terms are reasonable in relation to the services to be provided and approved the investment advisory agreement as being in the best interests of our stockholders.

### **Administration Agreement**

Under the administration agreement, Stellus Capital Management furnishes us with office facilities and equipment and will provide us with clerical, bookkeeping, recordkeeping and other administrative services at such facilities. Stellus Capital Management also performs, or oversees the performance of, our required administrative services, which include being responsible for the financial and other records that we are required to maintain and preparing reports to our stockholders and reports and other materials filed with the SEC. In addition, Stellus Capital Management assists us in determining and publishing our net asset value, oversees the preparation and filing of our tax returns and the printing and dissemination of reports and other materials to our stockholders, and generally oversees the payment of our expenses and the performance of administrative and professional services rendered to us by others. Under the administration agreement, Stellus Capital Management also provides managerial assistance on our behalf to those portfolio companies that have accepted our offer to provide such assistance.

Payments under the administration agreement are equal to an amount based upon our allocable portion (subject to the review of our board of directors) of Stellus Capital Management's overhead in performing its obligations under the administration agreement, including rent, the fees and expenses associated with performing compliance functions and our allocable portion of the cost of our chief financial officer and chief compliance officer and their respective staffs.

In addition, if requested to provide significant managerial assistance to our portfolio companies, Stellus Capital Management will be paid an additional amount based on the services provided, which shall not exceed the amount we receive from such portfolio companies for providing this assistance. The administration agreement has an initial term of two years and may be renewed with the approval of our board of directors. The administration agreement may be terminated by either party without penalty upon 60 days' written notice to the other party. To the extent that Stellus Capital Management outsources any of its functions, we will pay the fees associated with such functions on a direct basis without any incremental profit to Stellus Capital Management. Stockholder approval is not required to amend the administration agreement.

### **Indemnification**

The administration agreement provides that Stellus Capital Management, its affiliates and their respective, officers, managers, partners, agents, employees, controlling persons and members, and any other person or entity affiliated with it, are entitled to indemnification from us for any damages, liabilities, costs and expenses (including reasonable attorneys' fees and amounts reasonably paid in settlement) arising from the rendering of Stellus Capital Management's services under the administration agreement or otherwise as our administrator. Our obligation to provide

indemnification under the administration agreement, however, is limited by the 1940 Act and Investment Company Act Release No. 11330, which, among other things, prohibit us from indemnifying any director, officer or other individual from any liability resulting directly from the willful misconduct, bad faith, gross negligence in the performance of duties or reckless disregard of applicable obligations and duties of the directors, officers or other individuals and require us to set forth reasonable and fair means for determining whether indemnification shall be made.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **License Agreement**

We have entered into a license agreement with Stellus Capital Management under which Stellus Capital Management has agreed to grant us a non-exclusive, royalty-free license to use the name Stellus Capital. Under this agreement, we have a right to use the Stellus Capital name for so long as Stellus Capital Management or one of its affiliates remains our investment adviser. Other than with respect to this limited license, we have no legal right to the Stellus Capital name. This license agreement will remain in effect for so long as the investment advisory agreement with Stellus Capital Management is in effect.

## **Exchange Act Reports**

We maintain a website at *www.stelluscapital.com*. The information on our website is not incorporated by reference in this annual report on Form 10-K.

We make available on or through our website certain reports and amendments to those reports that we file with or furnish to the SEC in accordance with the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, or the Exchange Act. These include our annual reports on Form 10-K, our quarterly reports on Form 10-Q and our current reports on Form 8-K. We make this information available on our website free of charge as soon as reasonably practicable after we electronically file the information with, or furnish it to, the SEC.

## **Regulation as a Business Development Company**

We are a BDC under the 1940 Act that has elected to be treated as a RIC under the Code. The 1940 Act contains prohibitions and restrictions relating to transactions between BDCs and their affiliates (including any investment advisers), principal underwriters and affiliates of those affiliates or underwriters and requires that a majority of the directors be persons other than interested persons, as that term is defined in the 1940 Act. In addition, the 1940 Act provides that we may not change the nature of our business so as to cease to be, or to withdraw our election as, a BDC unless approved by a majority of our outstanding voting securities.

We may invest up to 100% of our assets in securities acquired directly from issuers in privately negotiated transactions. With respect to such securities, we may, for the purpose of public resale, be deemed an underwriter as that term is defined in the Securities Act. Our intention is to not write (sell) or buy put or call options to manage risks associated with the publicly traded securities of our portfolio companies, except that we may enter into hedging transactions to manage the risks associated with interest rate fluctuations. However, we may purchase or otherwise receive warrants to purchase the common stock of our portfolio companies in connection with acquisition financing or other investments. Similarly, in connection with an acquisition, we may acquire rights to require the issuers of acquired securities or their affiliates to repurchase them under certain circumstances. We also do not intend to acquire securities issued by any investment company that exceed the limits imposed by the 1940 Act. Under these limits, we generally cannot acquire more than 3% of the voting stock of any registered investment company, invest more than 5% of the value of our total assets in the securities of one investment company or invest more than 10% of the value of our total assets in the securities of more than one investment company. With regard to that portion of our portfolio invested in securities issued by investment companies, it should be noted that such investments might subject our stockholders to additional expenses. None of these policies is fundamental and may be changed without stockholder approval upon 60 days prior written notice to stockholders.

## Qualifying Assets

Under the 1940 Act, a BDC may not acquire any asset other than assets of the type listed in section 55(a) of the 1940 Act, which are referred to as qualifying assets, unless, at the time the acquisition is made, qualifying assets represent at least 70% of the company's total assets. The principal categories of qualifying assets relevant to our business are the following:

Securities purchased in transactions not involving any public offering from the issuer of such securities, which issuer (subject to certain limited exceptions) is an eligible portfolio company, or from any person who is, or has been during the preceding 13 months, an affiliated person of an eligible portfolio company, or from any other person, subject to such rules as may be prescribed by the SEC. Under the 1940 Act and the rules thereunder, eligible portfolio companies include (1) private domestic operating companies, (2) public domestic operating companies whose securities

21

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

are not listed on a national securities exchange (e.g., the New York Stock Exchange), and (3) public domestic operating companies having a market capitalization of less than \$250 million. Public domestic operating companies whose securities are quoted on the over-the-counter bulletin board or through Pink Sheets LLC are not listed on a national securities exchange and therefore are eligible portfolio companies.

(2) Securities of any eligible portfolio company which we control.

Securities purchased in a private transaction from a U.S. issuer that is not an investment company or from an affiliated person of the issuer, or in transactions incident to such a private transaction, if the issuer is in bankruptcy (3) and subject to reorganization or if the issuer, immediately prior to the purchase of its securities, was unable to meet its obligations as they came due without material assistance other than conventional lending or financing arrangements.

(4) Securities of an eligible portfolio company purchased from any person in a private transaction if there is no ready market for such securities and we already own 60% of the outstanding equity of the eligible portfolio company.

(5) Securities received in exchange for or distributed on or with respect to securities described above, or pursuant to the exercise of warrants or rights relating to such securities.

(6) Cash, cash equivalents, U.S. government securities or high-quality debt securities that mature in one year or less from the date of investment.

The regulations defining qualifying assets may change over time. We may adjust our investment focus as needed to comply with and/or take advantage of any regulatory, legislative, administrative or judicial actions in this area.

## **Managerial Assistance to Portfolio Companies**

In order to count portfolio securities as qualifying assets for the purpose of the 70% test, a BDC must either control the issuer of the securities or must offer to make available to the issuer of the securities significant managerial assistance. However, when the BDC purchases securities in conjunction with one or more other persons acting together and one of the other persons in the group may make available such managerial assistance. Making available managerial assistance means any arrangement whereby the BDC, through its directors, officers, employees or agents, offers to provide, and, if accepted, does so provide, significant guidance and counsel concerning the management, operations or business objectives and policies of a portfolio company. Stellus Capital Management will provide such managerial assistance on our behalf to portfolio companies that request this assistance.

## **Temporary Investments**

Pending investment in other types of qualifying assets, as described above, our investments may consist of cash, cash equivalents, U.S. government securities, repurchase agreements and high-quality debt investments that mature in one year or less from the date of investment, which we refer to, collectively, as temporary investments, so that 70% of our assets are qualifying assets or temporary investments. Typically, we will invest in U.S. Treasury bills or in repurchase agreements, so long as the agreements are fully collateralized by cash or securities issued by the U.S. government or its agencies. A repurchase agreement involves the purchase by an investor, such as us, of a specified security and the simultaneous agreement by the seller to repurchase it at an agreed-upon future date and at a price that is greater than the purchase price by an amount that reflects an agreed-upon interest rate. There is no percentage restriction on the proportion of our assets that may be invested in such repurchase agreements. However, if more than 25% of our total assets constitute repurchase agreements from a single counterparty, we would not meet the diversification tests in order to maintain our qualification as a RIC for U.S. federal income tax purposes. Accordingly, we do not intend to enter into repurchase agreements with a single counterparty in excess of this limit. Stellus Capital Management will monitor the creditworthiness of the counterparties with which we enter into repurchase agreement transactions.





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **Senior Securities**

We are permitted, under specified conditions, to issue multiple classes of indebtedness and one class of stock senior to our common stock if our asset coverage, as defined in the 1940 Act, is at least equal to 200% immediately after each such issuance. We may also borrow amounts up to 5% of the value of our total assets for temporary or emergency purposes without regard to asset coverage. For a discussion of the risks associated with leverage, see Item 1A. Risk Factors Risks Relating to our Business and Structure Regulations governing our operation as a BDC affect our ability to, and the way in which we, raise additional capital. As a BDC, the necessity of raising additional capital may expose us to risks, including the typical risks associated with leverage.

### **Common Stock**

We are not generally able to issue and sell our common stock at a price below net asset value per share. We may, however, sell our common stock at a price below the current net asset value of the common stock if our board of directors determines that such sale is in our best interests and that of our stockholders, and our stockholders approve such sale. In any such case, the price at which our securities are to be issued and sold may not be less than a price which, in the determination of our board of directors, closely approximates the market value of such securities (less any distributing commission or discount). We would need approval from our stockholders to issue shares below the then current net asset value per share any time after the expiration of the current approval. We may also make rights offerings to our stockholders at prices per share less than the net asset value per share, subject to applicable requirements of the 1940 Act.

### **Codes of Ethics**

We and Stellus Capital Management have each adopted a code of ethics pursuant to Rule 17j-1 under the 1940 Act that establishes procedures for personal investments and restricts certain personal securities transactions. Personnel subject to each such code may invest in securities for their personal investment accounts, including securities that may be purchased or held by us, so long as such investments are made in accordance with such code's requirements. You may read and copy our code of ethics at the SEC's Public Reference Room in Washington, D.C. You may obtain information on the operation of the Public Reference Room by calling the SEC at (202) 551-8090. In addition, each code of ethics is available on the EDGAR Database on the SEC's website at [www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov). You may also obtain copies of each code of ethics, after paying a duplicating fee, by electronic request at the following e-mail address: [publicinfo@sec.gov](mailto:publicinfo@sec.gov), or by writing the SEC's Public Reference Section, 100 F Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20549.

### **Proxy Voting Policies and Procedures**

We have delegated our proxy voting responsibility to Stellus Capital Management. The proxy voting policies and procedures of Stellus Capital Management are set out below. The guidelines will be reviewed periodically by Stellus Capital Management and our directors who are not interested persons, and, accordingly, are subject to change.

*Introduction.* As an investment adviser registered under the Advisers Act, Stellus Capital Management has a fiduciary duty to act solely in our best interests. As part of this duty, Stellus Capital Management recognizes that it must vote our securities in a timely manner free of conflicts of interest and in our best interests.

Stellus Capital Management's policies and procedures for voting proxies for its investment advisory clients are intended to comply with Section 206 of, and Rule 206(4)-6 under, the Advisers Act.

*Proxy Policies.* Stellus Capital Management votes proxies relating to our portfolio securities in what it perceives to be the best interest of our stockholders. Stellus Capital Management reviews on a case-by-case basis each proposal submitted to a stockholder vote to determine its effect on the portfolio securities we hold. In most cases Stellus Capital Management will vote in favor of proposals that Stellus Capital Management believes are likely to increase the value of the portfolio securities we hold. Although Stellus Capital Management will generally vote against proposals that may have a negative effect on our portfolio securities, Stellus Capital Management may vote for such a proposal if there exist compelling long-term reasons to do so.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Stellus Capital Management has established a proxy voting committee and adopted proxy voting guidelines and related procedures. The proxy voting committee establishes proxy voting guidelines and procedures, oversees the internal proxy voting process, and reviews proxy voting issues. To ensure that Stellus Capital Management's vote is not the product of a conflict of interest, Stellus Capital Management requires that anyone involved in the decision-making process disclose to our Chief Compliance Officer any potential conflict that he or she is aware of and any contact that he or she has had with any interested party regarding a proxy vote. Where conflicts of interest may be present, Stellus Capital Management will disclose such conflicts to us, including our independent directors and may request guidance from us on how to vote such proxies.

*Proxy Voting Records.* You may obtain information about how Stellus Capital Management voted proxies by making a written request for proxy voting information to: Stellus Capital Investment Corporation, Attention: Investor Relations, 4400 Post Oak Parkway, Suite 2200, Houston, TX 77027, or by calling us collect at (713) 292-5414. The SEC also maintains a website at [www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov) that contains this information.

## **Privacy Principles**

We are committed to maintaining the privacy of our stockholders and to safeguarding their nonpublic personal information. The following information is provided to help you understand what personal information we collect, how we protect that information and why, in certain cases, we may share information with select other parties.

Generally, we do not receive any nonpublic personal information relating to our stockholders, although certain nonpublic personal information of our stockholders may become available to us. We do not disclose any nonpublic personal information about our stockholders or former stockholders to anyone, except as permitted by law or as is necessary in order to service stockholder accounts (for example, to a transfer agent or third-party administrator).

We restrict access to nonpublic personal information about our stockholders to employees of Stellus Capital Management and its affiliates with a legitimate business need for the information. We intend to maintain physical, electronic and procedural safeguards designed to protect the nonpublic personal information of our stockholders.

## **Other**

We are required to provide and maintain a bond issued by a reputable fidelity insurance company to protect us against larceny and embezzlement. Furthermore, as a BDC, we are prohibited from protecting any director or officer against any liability to us or our stockholders arising from willful misfeasance, bad faith, gross negligence or reckless disregard of the duties involved in the conduct of such person's office.

We and Stellus Capital Management are each required to adopt and implement written policies and procedures reasonably designed to prevent violation of relevant federal securities laws, review these policies and procedures annually for their adequacy and the effectiveness of their implementation, and designate a chief compliance officer to be responsible for administering the policies and procedures.

In general, BDCs are prohibited under the 1940 Act from knowingly participating in certain transactions with our affiliates without the prior approval of our board of directors who are not interested persons and, in some cases, prior approval by the SEC. The SEC has interpreted the BDC prohibition on transactions with affiliates to prohibit all joint transactions between entities that share a common investment adviser. The staff of the SEC has granted no-action relief permitting purchases of a single class of privately placed securities provided that the adviser negotiates no term other than price and certain other conditions are met. In addition, we received exemptive relief from the SEC to

co-invest with investment funds managed by Stellus Capital Management (other than the D. E. Shaw group funds, as defined below) where doing so is consistent with our investment strategy as well as applicable law (including the terms and conditions of the exemptive order issued by the SEC). Under the terms of the relief permitting us to co-invest with other funds managed by Stellus Capital Management, a required majority (as defined in Section 57(o) of the 1940 Act) of our independent directors must make certain conclusions in connection with a co-investment transaction, including (1) the terms of the proposed transaction, including the consideration to be paid, are reasonable and fair to us and our stockholders and do not involve overreaching of us or our stockholders on the part of any person

TABLE OF CONTENTS

concerned and (2) the transaction is consistent with the interests of our stockholders and is consistent with our investment objectives and strategies. We intend to co-invest, subject to the conditions included in the exemptive order we received from the SEC, with a private credit fund managed by Stellus Capital Management that has an investment strategy that is identical to our investment strategy. We believe that such co-investments may afford us additional investment opportunities and an ability to achieve greater diversification.

## **Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002**

The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 imposes a wide variety of regulatory requirements on publicly held companies and their insiders. Many of these requirements affect us. For example:

pursuant to Rule 13a-14 under the Exchange Act, our principal executive officer and principal financial officer must certify the accuracy of the financial statements contained in our periodic reports;

pursuant to Item 307 under Regulation S-K, our periodic reports must disclose our conclusions about the effectiveness of our disclosure controls and procedures;

pursuant to Rule 13a-15 under the Exchange Act, our management must prepare an annual report regarding its assessment of our internal control over financial reporting; and

pursuant to Item 308 of Regulation S-K and Rule 13a-15 under the Exchange Act, our periodic reports must disclose whether there were significant changes in our internal controls over financial reporting or in other factors that could significantly affect these controls subsequent to the date of their evaluation, including any corrective actions with regard to significant deficiencies and material weaknesses.

## **Taxation as a Regulated Investment Company**

As a BDC, we have elected and qualified to be treated as a RIC under Subchapter M of the Code. As a RIC, we generally do not have to pay corporate-level U.S. federal income taxes on any ordinary income or capital gains that we distribute to our stockholders as dividends. To continue to maintain our qualification as a RIC, we must, among other things, meet certain source-of-income and asset diversification requirements (as described below). In addition, to maintain for RIC treatment we must distribute to our stockholders, for each taxable year, at least 90% of our investment company taxable income, which is generally our ordinary income plus the excess of our realized net short-term capital gains over our realized net long-term capital losses (the Annual Distribution Requirement ).

For any taxable year in which we:

qualify as a RIC; and

satisfy the Annual Distribution Requirement;

We will not be subject to U.S. federal income tax on the portion of our income we distribute to stockholders. We will be subject to U.S. federal income tax at the regular corporate rates on any income or capital gains not distributed (or deemed distributed) to our stockholders.

We will be subject to a 4% nondeductible U.S. federal excise tax on our undistributed income unless we distribute in a timely manner an amount at least equal to the sum of (a) 98% of our net ordinary income for each calendar year, (b) 98.2% of our capital gain net income for the one-year period ending December 31 and (c) any income realized, but not distributed, in the preceding year and on which we paid no U.S. federal income tax, or the Excise Tax Avoidance Requirement. For this purpose, however, any net ordinary income or capital gain net income retained by us that is subject to corporate income tax for the tax year ending in that calendar year will be considered to have been distributed by year end (or earlier if estimated taxes are paid).

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In order to qualify as a RIC for U.S. federal income tax purposes, we must, among other things:

continue to qualify as a BDC under the 1940 Act at all times during each year;  
derive in each taxable year at least 90% of our gross income from dividends, interest, payments with respect to certain securities loans, gains from the sale of stock or other securities, or other income

25

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

derived with respect to our business of investing in such stock or securities, and net income derived from interests in qualified publicly traded partnerships (which generally are partnerships that are traded on an established securities market or tradable on a secondary market, other than partnerships that derive 90% of their income from interest, dividends and other permitted RIC income), or the 90% Income Test; and

diversify our holdings so that at the end of each quarter of the taxable year:

at least 50% of the value of our assets consists of cash, cash equivalents, U.S. government securities, securities of other RICs, and other securities if such other securities of any one issuer do not represent more than 5% of the value of our assets or more than 10% of the outstanding voting securities of the issuer; and

no more than 25% of the value of our assets is invested in the securities, other than U.S. government securities or securities of other RICs, of one issuer or of two or more issuers that are controlled, as determined under applicable tax rules, by us and that are engaged in the same or similar or related trades or businesses or in the securities of one or more qualified publicly traded partnerships, or the Diversification Tests.

We may invest in partnerships, including qualified publicly traded partnerships, which may result in our being subject to state, local or foreign income, franchise or withholding tax liabilities.

We may be required to recognize taxable income in circumstances in which we do not receive cash. For example, if we hold debt obligations that are treated under applicable tax rules as having original issue discount (such as debt instruments with PIK interest or, in certain cases, with increasing interest rates or issued with warrants), we must include in income each year a portion of the original issue discount that accrues over the life of the obligation, regardless of whether cash representing such income is received by us in the same taxable year. Because any original issue discount accrued will be included in our investment company taxable income for the year of accrual, we may be required to make a distribution to our stockholders in order to satisfy the Annual Distribution Requirement, even though we will not have received any corresponding cash amount. If we are not able to obtain sufficient cash from other sources to satisfy the Annual Distribution Requirement, we may fail to maintain our tax treatment as a RIC and become subject to corporate-level U.S. federal income taxes on all of our taxable income without the benefit of the dividends-paid deduction.

Although we do not presently expect to do so, we are authorized to borrow funds and to sell assets in order to satisfy (i) the Annual Distribution Requirements and to otherwise eliminate our liability for U.S. federal income and excise taxes and/or (ii) the Diversification Tests. However, under the 1940 Act, we are not permitted in certain circumstances to make distributions to our stockholders while our debt obligations and other senior securities are outstanding unless certain asset coverage tests are met. See Item 1A. Regulation as a Business Development Company Senior Securities. Moreover, our ability to dispose of assets to meet the Annual Distribution Requirement, the Excise Tax Avoidance Requirement or the Diversification Test may be limited by (a) the illiquid nature of our portfolio and/or (b) other requirements relating to our qualifications as a RIC, including the Diversification Tests. If we dispose of assets in order to meet the Annual Distribution Requirement, the Excise Tax Avoidance Requirement or the Diversification Tests, we may make such dispositions at times that, from an investment standpoint, are not advantageous.

In addition, we have formed and operate a SBIC subsidiary, and are partially dependent on the SBIC subsidiary for cash distributions to enable us to meet the RIC distribution requirements. The SBIC subsidiary may be limited by the Small Business Investment Act of 1958, and SBA regulations governing SBICs, from making certain distributions to us that may be necessary to maintain our tax treatment as a RIC. We may have to request a waiver of the SBA's restrictions for the SBIC subsidiary to make certain distributions to maintain our RIC tax treatment. We cannot assure you that the SBA will grant such waiver. If the SBIC subsidiary is unable to obtain a waiver, compliance with the SBA regulations may cause us to fail to maintain our tax treatment as a RIC, which would result in us becoming subject to corporate-level federal income tax.



Certain of our investment practices may be subject to special and complex U.S. federal income tax provisions that may, among other things, (a) treat dividends that would otherwise constitute qualified dividend

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

income as non-qualified dividend income, (b) treat dividends that would otherwise be eligible for the corporate dividends received deduction as ineligible for such treatment, (c) disallow, suspend or otherwise limit the allowance of certain losses or deductions, (d) convert lower-taxed long term capital gain into higher-taxed short-term capital gain or ordinary income, (e) convert an ordinary loss or a deduction into a capital loss (the deductibility of which is more limited), (f) cause us to recognize income or gain without a corresponding receipt of cash, (g) adversely affect the time as to when a purchase or sale of stock or securities is deemed to occur, (h) adversely alter the characterization of certain complex financial transactions and (i) produce income that will not be qualifying income for purposes of the 90% Income Test. We intend to monitor our transactions and may make certain tax elections to mitigate the effect of these provisions and prevent our disqualification as a RIC.

Gain or loss realized by us from warrants acquired by us as well as any loss attributable to the lapse of such warrants generally will be treated as capital gain or loss. Such capital gain or loss generally will be long term or short term, depending on how long we held a particular warrant. Some of the income and fees that we may recognize will not satisfy the 90% Income Test. In order to ensure that such income and fees do not disqualify us as a RIC for a failure to satisfy the 90% Income Test, we may hold assets that generate such income and provide services that generate such fees indirectly through one or more entities treated as corporations for U.S. federal income tax purposes. Such corporations will be required to pay U.S. federal corporate income tax on their earnings, which ultimately will reduce our return on such income and fees.

If we are unable to qualify for tax treatment as a RIC, and if certain remedial provisions are not available, we would be subject to tax on all of our taxable income at regular corporate rates. We would not be able to deduct distributions to stockholders, nor would they be required to be made. Subject to certain limitations under the Code, corporate stockholders would be eligible to claim a dividends received deduction with respect to such distributions, non-corporate stockholders would be able to treat such dividend income as qualified dividend income, which is subject to reduced rates of U.S. federal income tax. Distributions in excess of our current and accumulated earnings and profits would be treated first as a return of capital to the extent of the stockholder's tax basis, and any remaining distributions would be treated as a capital gain. If we fail to qualify as a RIC for a period greater than two taxable years, to requalify as a RIC in a subsequent year we may be subject to regular corporate tax on any net built-in gains with respect to certain of our assets (i.e., the excess of the aggregate gains, including items of income, over aggregate losses that would have been realized with respect to such assets if we had been liquidated) that we elect to recognize on requalification or when recognized over the next ten years (or shorter applicable period).

## **Our Status as an Emerging Growth Company**

We are an emerging growth company, as defined in the Jumpstart Our Business Startups Act of 2012, or the JOBS Act. As an emerging growth company, we may take advantage of specified reduced disclosure and other requirements that are otherwise applicable generally to public companies. These eased requirements include an exemption from certain financial disclosure and governance requirements and relaxed restrictions on the sale of securities. The JOBS Act provides scaled disclosure provisions for emerging growth companies, including, among other things, removing the requirement that emerging growth companies comply with Sarbanes-Oxley Act Section 404(b) auditor attestation of internal control over financial reporting. Section 107(b) of the JOBS Act also permits an emerging growth companies to elect an extended transition period for complying with new or revised accounting standards that have different effective dates for public and private companies until such time as these new or revised standards are made applicable to all private companies. We have elected to take advantage of the extended transition period for complying with new or revised accounting standards, which may make it more difficult for investors and securities analysts to evaluate us since our financial statements may not be comparable to companies that comply with public company effective dates. We will remain an emerging growth company until the earlier of (a) the last day of the fiscal year (i)

following the fifth anniversary of the completion of our initial public offering (IPO) on November 13, 2012, (ii) in which we have total annual gross revenue of at least \$1.0 billion, or (iii) in which we are deemed to be a large accelerated filer, which means the market value of our common stock that is held by non-affiliates exceeds \$700 million as of the prior June 30<sup>th</sup>, and (b) the date on which we have issued more than \$1.0 billion in non-convertible debt during the prior three-year period. We will no longer qualify as an emerging growth company beginning January 1, 2017.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **The New York Stock Exchange Corporate Governance Regulations**

The New York Stock Exchange has adopted corporate governance regulations that listed companies must comply with. We are in compliance with such corporate governance listing standards applicable to BDCs.

### **Regulation as a Small Business Investment Company**

Our wholly-owned subsidiary's SBIC license allows it to obtain leverage by issuing SBA-guaranteed debentures, subject to customary procedures. SBA-guaranteed debentures are non-recourse, interest only debentures with interest payable semi-annually and have a ten-year maturity. The principal amount of SBA-guaranteed debentures is not required to be paid prior to maturity but may be prepaid at any time without penalty. The interest rate of SBA-guaranteed debentures is fixed at the time of issuance at a market-driven spread over U.S. Treasury Notes with ten-year maturities.

SBICs are designed to stimulate the flow of private equity capital to eligible small businesses. Under SBA regulations, SBICs may make loans to eligible small businesses and invest in the equity securities of small businesses. Under present SBA regulations, eligible small businesses include businesses that have a tangible net worth not exceeding \$19.5 million and have average annual fully taxed net income not exceeding \$6.5 million for the two most recent fiscal years. In addition, an SBIC must devote 25% of its investment activity to smaller concerns as defined by the SBA. A smaller concern is one that has a net worth not exceeding \$6 million and has average annual fully taxed net income not exceeding \$2 million for the two most recent fiscal years. SBA regulations also provide alternative size standard criteria to determine eligibility, which depend on the industry in which the business is engaged and are based on such factors as the number of employees and gross sales. According to SBA regulations, SBICs may make long-term loans to small businesses, invest in the equity securities of such businesses and provide them with consulting and advisory services.

SBA regulations currently limit the amount that an SBIC subsidiary may borrow to a maximum of \$150 million when it has at least \$75 million in regulatory capital. Affiliated SBICs are permitted to issue up to a combined maximum amount of \$225 million when they have at least \$112.5 million in regulatory capital. In December 2015, the 2016 omnibus spending bill approved by Congress and signed into law by the President increased the amount of SBA-guaranteed debentures that affiliated SBIC funds can have outstanding from \$225 million to \$350 million. This new legislation may allow us to issue additional SBIC debentures above the \$225 million threshold subject to SBA approval. As of December 31, 2016, our SBIC subsidiary had \$32.5 million in regulatory capital and \$65.0 million in SBA-guaranteed debentures outstanding, which approximated their fair value.

We have received exemptive relief from the SEC to permit us to exclude the debt of our SBIC subsidiaries guaranteed by the SBA from the definition of senior securities in the 200% asset coverage test under the 1940 Act. This allows us increased flexibility under the 200% asset coverage test by permitting us to borrow up to \$225 million more than we would otherwise be able to absent the receipt of this exemptive relief.

The SBA restricts the ability of SBICs to repurchase their capital stock. SBA regulations also include restrictions on a change of control or transfer of an SBIC and require that SBICs invest idle funds in accordance with SBA regulations.

In addition, our SBIC subsidiary may also be limited in its ability to make distributions to us if it does not have sufficient capital, in accordance with SBA regulations.

Our SBIC subsidiary is subject to regulation and oversight by the SBA, including requirements with respect to maintaining certain minimum financial ratios and other covenants. Receipt of an SBIC license does not assure that our SBIC subsidiary will receive SBA guaranteed debenture funding, which is dependent upon our SBIC subsidiary continuing to be in compliance with SBA regulations and policies. The SBA, as a creditor, will have a superior claim to our SBIC subsidiary's assets over our stockholders in the event we liquidate our SBIC subsidiary or the SBA exercises its remedies under the SBA-guaranteed debentures issued by our SBIC subsidiary upon an event of default.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Item 1A. Risk Factors**

**RISK FACTORS**

*Investing in our securities involves a number of significant risks. Before you invest in our securities, you should be aware of various risks, including those described below. You should carefully consider these risk factors, together with all of the other information included in this annual report on Form 10-K, before you decide whether to make an investment in our securities. The risks set out below are the principal risks with respect to an investment in our securities generally and with respect to a BDC with investment objectives, investment policies, capital structures or trading markets similar to ours. However, they may not be the only risks we face. Additional risks and uncertainties not presently known to us or not presently deemed material by us may also impair our operations and performance. If any of the following events occur, our business, financial condition, results of operations and cash flows could be materially and adversely affected. In such case, our net asset value and the trading price of our securities could decline, and you may lose all or part of your investment.*

**Risks Relating to our Business and Structure**

**We are dependent upon key personnel of Stellus Capital Management for our future success. If Stellus Capital Management were to lose any of its key personnel, our ability to achieve our investment objective could be significantly harmed.**

We depend on the diligence, skill and network of business contacts of the investment professionals of Stellus Capital Management to achieve our investment objective. Stellus Capital Management's team of investment professionals evaluates, negotiates, structures, closes and monitors our investments in accordance with the terms of our investment advisory agreement. We can offer no assurance, however, that Stellus Capital Management's investment professionals will continue to provide investment advice to us.

Stellus Capital Management's investment committee, which provides oversight over our investment activities, is provided to us by Stellus Capital Management under the investment advisory agreement. Stellus Capital Management's investment committee consists of five members, including Messrs. Ladd, D'Angelo and Davis, each a member of our board of directors, Mr. Huskinson, our chief financial officer and chief compliance officer and the chief financial officer of Stellus Capital Management and Mr. Overbergen, an investment professional of Stellus Capital Management. The loss of any member of Stellus Capital Management's investment committee limit our ability to achieve our investment objective and operate our business. This could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition, results of operations and cash flows.

**Our business model depends to a significant extent upon strong referral relationships. Any inability of Stellus Capital Management to maintain or develop these relationships, or the failure of these relationships to generate investment opportunities, could adversely affect our business.**

We depend upon Stellus Capital Management to maintain its relationships with private equity sponsors, placement agents, investment banks, management groups and other financial institutions, and we rely to a significant extent upon

these relationships to provide us with potential investment opportunities. If Stellus Capital Management fails to maintain such relationships, or to develop new relationships with other sources of investment opportunities, we will not be able to grow our investment portfolio. In addition, individuals with whom Stellus Capital Management has relationships are not obligated to provide us with investment opportunities, and we can offer no assurance that these relationships will generate investment opportunities for us in the future.

**Our financial condition, results of operations and cash flows will depend on our ability to manage our business effectively.**

Our ability to achieve our investment objective will depend on our ability to manage our business and to grow our investments and earnings. This will depend, in turn, on Stellus Capital Management's ability to identify, invest in and monitor portfolio companies that meet our investment criteria. The achievement of our investment objective on a cost-effective basis will depend upon Stellus Capital Management's execution of our

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

investment process, its ability to provide competent, attentive and efficient services to us and, to a lesser extent, our access to financing on acceptable terms. Stellus Capital Management's investment professionals will have substantial responsibilities in connection with the management of other investment funds, accounts and investment vehicles. The personnel of Stellus Capital Management may be called upon to provide managerial assistance to our portfolio companies. These activities may distract them from sourcing new investment opportunities for us or slow our rate of investment. Any failure to manage our business and our future growth effectively could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition, results of operations and cash flows.

### **There are significant potential conflicts of interest that could negatively affect our investment returns.**

The members of Stellus Capital Management's investment committee serve, or may serve, as officers, directors, members, or principals of entities that operate in the same or a related line of business as we do, or of investment funds, accounts, or investment vehicles managed by Stellus Capital Management. Similarly, Stellus Capital Management may have other clients with similar, different or competing investment objectives. In serving in these multiple capacities, they may have obligations to other clients or investors in those entities, the fulfillment of which may not be in the best interests of us or our stockholders. For example, Stellus Capital Management currently manages private credit funds that have an investment strategy that is identical to our investment strategy, and with which we intend to co-invest. Stellus Capital Management also provides sub-advisory services to the D. E. Shaw group with respect to a private investment fund and a strategy of a private multi-strategy investment fund to which the D. E. Shaw group serves as investment adviser that have an investment strategy similar to our investment strategy.

In addition, there may be times when Stellus Capital Management, members of its investment committee or its other investment professionals have interests that differ from those of our stockholders, giving rise to a conflict of interest. In particular, a private investment fund for which Stellus Capital Management provides investment advisory services hold minority equity interests in certain of the portfolio companies in which we hold debt investments. As a result, Stellus Capital Management, members of its investment committee or its other investment professionals may face conflicts of interest in connection with making business decisions for these portfolio companies to the extent that such decisions affect the debt and equity holders in these portfolio companies differently. In addition, Stellus Capital Management may face conflicts of interests in connection with making investment or other decisions, including granting loan waivers or concessions, on our behalf with respect to these portfolio companies given that they also provide investment advisory services to a private investment fund that holds the equity interests in these portfolio companies. Although our investment adviser will endeavor to handle these investment and other decisions in a fair and equitable manner, we and the holders of the shares of our common stock could be adversely affected by these decisions. Moreover, given the subjective nature of the investment and other decisions made by our investment adviser on our behalf, we are unable to monitor these potential conflicts of interest between us and our investment adviser; however, our board of directors, including the independent directors, reviews conflicts of interest in connection with its review of the performance of our investment adviser.

### **The senior investment professionals and other investment team members of Stellus Capital Management may, from time to time, possess material non-public information, limiting our investment discretion.**

The senior investment professionals and other investment team members of Stellus Capital Management, including members of Stellus Capital Management's investment committee, may serve as directors of, or in a similar capacity with, portfolio companies in which we invest, the securities of which are purchased or sold on our behalf. In the event



that material nonpublic information is obtained with respect to such companies, or we become subject to trading restrictions under the internal trading policies of those companies or as a result of applicable law or regulations, we could be prohibited for a period of time from purchasing or selling the securities of such companies, and this prohibition may have an adverse effect on us.

**The incentive fee structure we have with Stellus Capital Management may create incentives that are not fully aligned with the interests of our stockholders.**

In the course of our investing activities, we pay management and incentive fees to Stellus Capital Management. We have entered into an investment advisory agreement with Stellus Capital Management that provides for a management fee based on the value of our gross assets. Because this fee is based on the value

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

of our gross assets, Stellus Capital Management will benefit when we incur debt or use leverage. This fee structure may encourage Stellus Capital Management to cause us to borrow money to finance additional investments. Under certain circumstances, the use of borrowed money may increase the likelihood of default, which would disfavor our stockholders. As a result of this arrangement, Stellus Capital Management may from time to time have interests that differ from those of our stockholders, giving rise to a conflict.

Our board of directors is charged with protecting our interests by monitoring how Stellus Capital Management addresses these and other conflicts of interests associated with its management services and compensation. While our board of directors is not expected to review or approve each investment decision, borrowing or incurrence of leverage, our independent directors will periodically review Stellus Capital Management's services and fees as well as its portfolio management decisions and portfolio performance. In connection with these reviews, our independent directors will consider whether our fees and expenses (including those related to leverage) remain appropriate.

### **Our incentive fee may induce Stellus Capital Management to make speculative investments.**

We pay Stellus Capital Management an incentive fee based, in part, upon net capital gains realized on our investments. Unlike that portion of the incentive fee based on income, there is no hurdle rate applicable to the portion of the incentive fee based on net capital gains. Additionally, under the incentive fee structure, Stellus Capital Management may benefit when capital gains are recognized and, because Stellus Capital Management will determine when to sell a holding, Stellus Capital Management will control the timing of the recognition of such capital gains. As a result, Stellus Capital Management may have a tendency to invest more capital in investments that are likely to result in capital gains as compared to income producing securities. Such a practice could result in our investing in more speculative securities than would otherwise be the case, which could result in higher investment losses, particularly during economic downturns.

### **We may be obligated to pay Stellus Capital Management incentive compensation even if we incur a loss and may pay more than 20.0% of our net capital gains because we cannot recover payments made in previous years.**

Stellus Capital Management is entitled to incentive compensation for each fiscal quarter in an amount equal to a percentage of the excess of our investment income for that quarter (before deducting incentive compensation) above a threshold return for that quarter and subject to a total return requirement. The general effect of this total return requirement is to prevent payment of the foregoing incentive compensation except to the extent 20.0% of the cumulative net increase in net assets resulting from operations over the then current and 11 preceding calendar quarters exceeds the cumulative incentive fees accrued and/or paid for the 11 preceding calendar quarters. Consequently, we may pay an incentive fee if we incurred losses more than three years prior to the current calendar quarter even if such losses have not yet been recovered in full. Thus, we may be required to pay Stellus Capital Management incentive compensation for a fiscal quarter even if there is a decline in the value of our portfolio or we incur a net loss for that quarter. If we pay an incentive fee of 20.0% of our realized capital gains (net of all realized capital losses and unrealized capital depreciation on a cumulative basis) and thereafter experience additional realized capital losses or unrealized capital depreciation, we will not be able to recover any portion of the incentive fee previously paid.

**Our ability to sell or otherwise exit investments in which affiliates of Stellus Capital Management also have an investment may be restricted, which may have a materially adverse impact on our ability to manage our investment portfolio.**

Pursuant to the 1940 Act, unless and until we receive exemptive relief from the SEC permitting us to do so, we may be prohibited from exiting our positions in portfolio companies in which funds affiliated with Stellus Capital Management also hold positions. As of December 31, 2016, our portfolio consisted of three assets in two portfolio companies once held by the D. E. Shaw group fund to which the D. E. Shaw group serves as investment adviser and is sub-advised by Stellus Capital Management. However, the D. E. Shaw group fund has retained equity investments in one of those two portfolio companies. To the extent that our investments in these portfolio companies need to be restructured or that we choose to exit these investments in the future, our ability to do so may be limited if such restructuring or exit also involves an affiliate or the D. E. Shaw group fund therein because such a transaction could be considered a joint transaction prohibited

TABLE OF CONTENTS

by the 1940 Act in the absence of our receipt of relief from the SEC in connection with such transaction. For example, if the D. E. Shaw group fund were required to approve a restructuring of our investment in one of these portfolio companies in its capacity as an equity holder thereof and the D. E. Shaw group fund were deemed to be our affiliate, such involvement by the D. E. Shaw group fund in the restructuring transaction may constitute a prohibited joint transaction under the 1940 Act. However, we do not believe that our ability to restructure or exit these investments will be significantly hampered due to the fact that the equity investments retained by the D. E. Shaw group fund are minority equity positions and, as a result, it is unlikely that the D. E. Shaw group fund will be or will be required to be involved in any such restructurings or exits.

**We operate in a highly competitive market for investment opportunities, which could reduce returns and result in losses.**

A number of entities compete with us to make the types of investments that we make. We compete with public and private funds, commercial and investment banks, commercial financing companies and, to the extent they provide an alternative form of financing, private equity and hedge funds. Many of our competitors are substantially larger and have considerably greater financial, technical and marketing resources than we do. For example, we believe some of our competitors may have access to funding sources that are not available to us. In addition, some of our competitors may have higher risk tolerances or different risk assessments, which could allow them to consider a wider variety of investments and establish more relationships than us. Furthermore, many of our competitors are not subject to the regulatory restrictions that the 1940 Act imposes on us as a BDC or the source-of-income, asset diversification and distribution requirements we must satisfy to maintain our RIC qualification. The competitive pressures we face may have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition, results of operations and cash flows. As a result of this competition, we may not be able to take advantage of attractive investment opportunities from time to time, and we may not be able to identify and make investments that are consistent with our investment objective.

With respect to the investments we make, we do not seek to compete based primarily on the interest rates we offer, and we believe that some of our competitors may make loans with interest rates that are lower than the rates we offer.

With respect to all investments, we may lose some investment opportunities if we do not match our competitors pricing, terms and structure. However, if we match our competitors pricing, terms and structure, we may experience decreased net interest income, lower yields and increased risk of credit loss. We may also compete for investment opportunities with investment funds, accounts and investment vehicles managed by Stellus Capital Management. Although Stellus Capital Management will allocate opportunities in accordance with its policies and procedures, allocations to such investment funds, accounts and investment vehicles will reduce the amount and frequency of opportunities available to us and may not be in the best interests of us and our stockholders.

**We will be subject to corporate-level income tax and may default under our revolving credit facility if we are unable to maintain our tax treatment as a RIC under Subchapter M of the Code.**

To maintain our qualification as a RIC under Subchapter M of the Code, we must meet certain source-of-income, asset diversification and distribution requirements. The distribution requirement for a RIC is satisfied if we distribute at least 90% of our net ordinary income and net short-term capital gains in excess of net long-term capital losses, if any, to our stockholders on an annual basis. Because we incur debt, we will be subject to certain asset coverage ratio requirements under the 1940 Act and financial covenants under loan and credit agreements that could, under certain circumstances, restrict us from making distributions necessary to maintain our qualification as a RIC. If we are unable to obtain cash from other sources, we may fail to maintain our qualification as a RIC and, thus, may be subject to

corporate-level income tax. To maintain our tax treatment as a RIC, we must also meet certain asset diversification requirements at the end of each calendar quarter. Failure to meet these tests may result in our having to dispose of certain investments quickly in order to prevent the loss of our tax treatment as a RIC. Because most of our investments are in private or thinly-traded public companies, any such dispositions may be made at disadvantageous prices and may result in substantial losses. No certainty can be provided, that we will satisfy the asset diversification requirements or the other requirements necessary to maintain our qualification and tax treatment as a RIC. If we fail to maintain our tax treatment as a RIC for any reason and become subject to corporate income tax, the resulting corporate income taxes could substantially reduce our net assets, the amount of income available for

TABLE OF CONTENTS

distributions to our stockholders and the amount of funds available for new investments. Furthermore, if we fail to maintain our qualification as a RIC, we may be in default under the terms of our revolving credit facility with various lenders (the Credit Facility ). Such a failure would have a material adverse effect on us and our stockholders.

**We may have difficulty paying our required distributions if we recognize income before, or without, receiving cash representing such income.**

For U.S. federal income tax purposes, we include in income certain amounts that we have not yet received in cash, such as the accrual of original issue discount. This may arise if we receive warrants in connection with the making of a loan and in other circumstances, or through contracted PIK interest, which represents contractual interest added to the loan balance and due at the end of the loan term. Such original issue discount, which could be significant relative to our overall investment activities, and increases in loan balances as a result of contracted PIK arrangements are included in income before we receive any corresponding cash payments. We also may be required to include in income certain other amounts that we will not receive in cash.

Since in certain cases we may recognize income before or without receiving cash representing such income, we may have difficulty meeting the requirement to distribute at least 90% of our net ordinary income and net short-term capital gains in excess of net long-term capital losses, if any, to maintain our qualification as a RIC. In such a case, we may have to sell some of our investments at times we would not consider advantageous or raise additional debt or equity capital or reduce new investment originations to meet these distribution requirements. If we are not able to obtain such cash from other sources, we may fail to maintain our qualification as a RIC and thus be subject to corporate-level income tax.

**PIK interest payments we receive will increase our assets under management and, as a result, will increase the amount of base management fees and incentive fees payable by us to Stellus Capital Management.**

Certain of our debt investments may contain provisions providing for the payment of PIK interest. Because PIK interest results in an increase in the size of the loan balance of the underlying loan, the receipt by us of PIK interest will have the effect of increasing our assets under management. As a result, because the base management fee that we pay to Stellus Capital Management is based on the value of our gross assets, the receipt by us of PIK interest will result in an increase in the amount of the base management fee payable by us. In addition, any such increase in a loan balance due to the receipt of PIK interest will cause such loan to accrue interest on the higher loan balance, which will result in an increase in our pre-incentive fee net investment income and, as a result, an increase in incentive fees that are payable by us to Stellus Capital Management.

**Regulations governing our operation as a BDC affect our ability to, and the way in which we, raise additional capital. As a BDC, the necessity of raising additional capital may expose us to risks, including the typical risks associated with leverage.**

We may issue debt securities or preferred stock and/or borrow money from banks or other financial institutions, which we refer to collectively as senior securities, up to the maximum amount permitted by the 1940 Act. Under the provisions of the 1940 Act, we are permitted as a BDC to issue senior securities in amounts such that our asset coverage ratio, as defined in the 1940 Act, equals at least 200% of our gross assets less all liabilities and indebtedness

We may have difficulty paying our required distributions if we recognize income before, or without, receiving cash re

not represented by senior securities, after each issuance of senior securities. If the value of our assets declines, we may be unable to satisfy this test. If that happens, we would not be able to borrow additional funds until we were able to comply with the 200% asset coverage ratio under the 1940 Act. Also, any amounts that we use to service our indebtedness would not be available for distributions to our common stockholders. If we issue senior securities, we will be exposed to typical risks associated with leverage, including an increased risk of loss.

We are not generally able to issue and sell our common stock at a price below net asset value per share. We may, however, sell our common stock, or warrants, options or rights to acquire our common stock, at a price below then-current net asset value per share of our common stock if our board of directors determines that such sale is in our best interests, and if our stockholders approve such sale. At our 2015 Annual Meeting

TABLE OF CONTENTS

of Stockholders, our stockholders voted to allow us to issue common stock at a price below net asset value per share for the period ending on the earlier of the one year anniversary of the date of the Company's 2015 Annual Meeting of Stockholders and the date of the Company's 2016 Annual Meeting of Stockholders. The Company did not seek such approval at the 2016 Annual Meeting of Stockholders. We would need similar future approval from our stockholders to issue shares below the then current net asset value per share any time after the expiration of the current approval.

Our stockholders did not specify a maximum discount below net asset value at which we are able to issue our common stock, although the number of shares sold in each offering may not exceed 25% of our outstanding common stock immediately prior to such sale. In addition, we cannot issue shares of our common stock below net asset value unless our board of directors determines that it would be in our and our stockholders' best interests to do so. Sales of common stock at prices below net asset value per share dilute the interests of existing stockholders, have the effect of reducing our net asset value per share and may reduce our market price per share. In addition, continuous sales of common stock below net asset value may have a negative impact on total returns and could have a negative impact on the market price of our shares of common stock. If we raise additional funds by issuing common stock, then the percentage ownership of our stockholders at that time will decrease, and you may experience dilution.

**Because we finance our investments with borrowed money, the potential for gain or loss on amounts invested in us is magnified and may increase the risk of investing in us.**

The use of leverage magnifies the potential for gain or loss on amounts invested. The use of leverage is generally considered a speculative investment technique and increases the risks associated with investing in our securities. If we continue to use leverage to partially finance our investments through banks, insurance companies and other lenders, you will experience increased risks of investing in our common stock. Lenders of these funds have fixed dollar claims on our assets that are superior to the claims of our common stockholders, and we would expect such lenders to seek recovery against our assets in the event of a default. We, through our SBIC subsidiary, intend to issue debt securities guaranteed by the SBA and sold in the capital markets. Upon any such issuance of debt securities and as a result of its guarantee of the debt securities, if any, the SBA would also have fixed dollar claims on the assets of our SBIC subsidiary that are superior to the claims of our common stockholders.

Upon the issuance of any debt securities guaranteed by the SBA, if we are unable to meet the financial obligations under the Notes or the Credit Facility, the SBA, as a creditor, would have a superior claim to the assets of our SBIC subsidiary over our stockholders in the event we liquidate or the SBA exercises its remedies under such debentures as the result of a default by us. In addition, under the terms of the Credit Facility and any borrowing facility or other debt instrument we may enter into, we are likely to be required to use the net proceeds of any investments that we sell to repay a portion of the amount borrowed under such facility or instrument before applying such net proceeds to any other uses. If the value of our assets decreases, leveraging would cause net asset value to decline more sharply than it otherwise would have had we not leveraged, thereby magnifying losses or eliminating our stake in a leveraged investment. Similarly, any decrease in our revenue or income will cause our net income to decline more sharply than it would have had we not borrowed. Such a decline would also negatively affect our ability to make distributions with respect to our common stock. Our ability to service any debt depends largely on our financial performance and is subject to prevailing economic conditions and competitive pressures. Moreover, as the base management fee payable to Stellus Capital Management is payable based on the value of our gross assets, including those assets acquired through the use of leverage, Stellus Capital Management will have a financial incentive to incur leverage, which may not be consistent with our stockholders' interests. In addition, our common stockholders bear the burden of any increase in our expenses as a result of our use of leverage, including interest expenses and any increase in the base management fee payable to Stellus Capital Management.



As a BDC, we generally are required to meet a coverage ratio of total assets to total borrowings and other senior securities, which include all of our borrowings and any preferred stock that we may issue in the future, of at least 200%. If this ratio declines below 200%, we will not be able to incur additional debt until we are able to comply with the 200% asset coverage ratio under the 1940 Act. This could have a material adverse effect on our operations, and we may not be able to make distributions. The amount of leverage that we employ will depend on Stellus Capital Management's and our board of directors' assessment of market and

TABLE OF CONTENTS

other factors at the time of any proposed borrowing. We cannot assure you that we will be able to obtain credit at all or on terms acceptable to us.

We have received exemptive relief from the SEC to permit us to exclude the debt of our SBIC subsidiary guaranteed by the SBA from the definition of senior securities in the 200% asset coverage ratio we are required to maintain under the 1940 Act. This relief allows us increased flexibility under the 200% asset coverage test by allowing us to borrow up to \$225 million more than we would otherwise be able to borrow absent the receipt of this exemptive relief.

In addition, our debt facilities may impose financial and operating covenants that restrict our business activities, including limitations that hinder our ability to finance additional loans and investments or to make the distributions required to maintain our qualification as a RIC under the Code.

**Substantially all of our assets are subject to security interests under the Credit Facility or claims of the SBA with respect to SBA-guaranteed debentures we may issue and, if we default on our obligations thereunder, we may suffer adverse consequences, including foreclosure on our assets.**

As of December 31, 2016, substantially all of our assets were pledged as collateral under the Credit Facility or are subject to a superior claim over the holders of our common stock or the Notes by the SBA pursuant to the SBA-guaranteed debentures. If we default on our obligations under the Credit Facility or the SBA-guaranteed debentures the lenders and/or the SBA may have the right to foreclose upon and sell, or otherwise transfer, the collateral subject to their security interests or their superior claim. In such event, we may be forced to sell our investments to raise funds to repay our outstanding borrowings in order to avoid foreclosure and these forced sales may be at times and at prices we would not consider advantageous. Moreover, such deleveraging of our company could significantly impair our ability to effectively operate our business in the manner in which we have historically operated. As a result, we could be forced to curtail or cease new investment activities and lower or eliminate the dividends that we have historically paid to our stockholders.

In addition, if the lenders exercise their right to sell the assets pledged under the Credit Facility, such sales may be completed at distressed sale prices, thereby diminishing or potentially eliminating the amount of cash available to us after repayment of the amounts outstanding under the Credit Facility.

**Because we use debt to finance our investments and may in the future issue senior securities including preferred stock and debt securities, if market interest rates were to increase, our cost of capital could increase, which could reduce our net investment income.**

Because we borrow money to make investments and may in the future issue senior securities including preferred stock and debt securities, our net investment income will depend, in part, upon the difference between the rate at which we borrow funds and the rate at which we invest those funds. As a result, we can offer no assurance that a significant change in market interest rates would not have a material adverse effect on our net investment income in the event we use debt to finance our investments. In periods of rising interest rates, our cost of funds would increase, which could reduce our net investment income. We may use interest rate risk management techniques in an effort to limit our exposure to interest rate fluctuations. We may utilize instruments such as forward contracts, currency options and interest rate swaps, caps, collars and floors to seek to hedge against fluctuations in the relative values of our portfolio positions from changes in currency exchange rates and market interest rates to the extent permitted by the 1940 Act.

Substantially all of our assets are subject to security interests under the Credit Facility or claims of the SBA with res

For example, to the extent any such instruments were to constitute senior securities under the 1940 Act, we would have to and will comply with the asset coverage requirements thereunder or, as permitted in lieu thereof, place certain assets in a segregated account to cover such instruments in accordance with SEC guidance, including, for example, Investment Company Act Release No. IC-10666, as applicable. There is otherwise no limit as to our ability to enter into such derivative transactions. In addition, a rise in the general level of interest rates typically leads to higher interest rates applicable to our debt investments. Accordingly, an increase in interest rates may result in an increase of the amount of our pre-incentive fee net investment income and, as a result, an increase in incentive fees payable to Stellus Capital Management. Adverse developments resulting from changes in interest rates or hedging transactions could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition and results of operations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Provisions in the Credit Facility or any other future borrowing facility may limit our discretion in operating our business.**

The Credit Facility is, and any future borrowing facility may be, backed by all or a portion of our loans and securities on which the lenders will or, in the case of a future facility, may have a security interest. We may pledge up to 100% of our assets and may grant a security interest in all of our assets under the terms of any debt instrument we enter into with lenders. We expect that any security interests we grant will be set forth in a guarantee and security agreement and evidenced by the filing of financing statements by the agent for the lenders. In addition, we expect that the custodian for our securities serving as collateral for such loan would include in its electronic systems notices indicating the existence of such security interests and, following notice of occurrence of an event of default, if any, and during its continuance, will only accept transfer instructions with respect to any such securities from the lender or its designee. If we were to default under the terms of any debt instrument, the agent for the applicable lenders would be able to assume control of the timing of disposition of any or all of our assets securing such debt, which would have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition, results of operations and cash flows.

In addition, any security interests as well as negative covenants under the Credit Facility or any other borrowing facility may limit our ability to incur additional liens or debt and may make it difficult for us to restructure or refinance indebtedness at or prior to maturity or obtain additional debt or equity financing. For example, under the terms of the Credit Facility, we have generally agreed to not incur any additional secured indebtedness, other than certain indebtedness that we may incur, in accordance with the Credit Facility, to allow us to purchase investments in U.S. Treasury Bills. In addition, we have agreed not to incur any additional indebtedness that has a maturity date prior to the maturity date of the Credit Facility. Further, if our borrowing base under the Credit Facility or any other borrowing facility were to decrease, we would be required to secure additional assets in an amount equal to any borrowing base deficiency. In the event that all of our assets are secured at the time of such a borrowing base deficiency, we could be required to repay advances under the Credit Facility or any other borrowing facility or make deposits to a collection account, either of which could have a material adverse impact on our ability to fund future investments and to make stockholder distributions.

In addition, under the Credit Facility or any other borrowing facility, we may be subject to limitations as to how borrowed funds may be used, which may include restrictions on geographic and industry concentrations, loan size, payment frequency and status, average life, collateral interests and investment ratings, as well as regulatory restrictions on leverage which may affect the amount of funding that may be obtained. There may also be certain requirements relating to portfolio performance, including required minimum portfolio yield and limitations on delinquencies and charge-offs, a violation of which could limit further advances and, in some cases, result in an event of default. Furthermore, we expect that the terms of the Credit Facility will contain a covenant requiring us to maintain compliance with RIC provisions at all times, subject to certain remedial provisions. Thus, a failure to maintain compliance with RIC provisions could result in an event of default under the Credit Facility. An event of default under the Credit Facility or any other borrowing facility could result in an accelerated maturity date for all amounts outstanding thereunder, which could have a material adverse effect on our business and financial condition. This could reduce our revenues and, by delaying any cash payment allowed to us under the Credit Facility or any other borrowing facility until the lenders have been paid in full, reduce our liquidity and cash flow and impair our ability to grow our business and maintain our qualification as a RIC.

**We may in the future determine to fund a portion of our investments with preferred stock, which would magnify the potential for gain or loss and the risks of investing in us in the same way as our borrowings.**

Preferred stock, which is another form of leverage, has the same risks to our common stockholders as borrowings because the dividends on any preferred stock we issue must be cumulative. Payment of such dividends and repayment of the liquidation preference of such preferred stock must take preference over any dividends or other payments to our common stockholders, and preferred stockholders are not subject to any of our expenses or losses and are not entitled to participate in any income or appreciation in excess of their stated preference.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Adverse developments in the credit markets may impair our ability to enter into any other future borrowing facility.**

During the economic downturn in the United States that began in mid-2007, many commercial banks and other financial institutions stopped lending or significantly curtailed their lending activity. In addition, in an effort to stem losses and reduce their exposure to segments of the economy deemed to be high risk, some financial institutions limited refinancing and loan modification transactions and reviewed the terms of existing facilities to identify bases for accelerating the maturity of existing lending facilities. If these conditions recur (for example, as a result of a broadening of the current Euro zone credit crisis), it may be difficult for us to enter into a new borrowing facility, obtain other financing to finance the growth of our investments, or refinance any outstanding indebtedness on acceptable economic terms, or at all.

**Most of our portfolio investments are recorded at fair value as determined in good faith by our board of directors and, as a result, there may be uncertainty as to the value of our portfolio investments.**

Most of our portfolio investments will take the form of securities that are not publicly traded. The fair value of loans, securities and other investments that are not publicly traded may not be readily determinable, and we value these investments at fair value as determined in good faith by our board of directors, including to reflect significant events affecting the value of our investments. Most, if not all, of our investments (other than cash and cash equivalents) are classified as Level 3 under ASC Topic 820. This means that our portfolio valuations are based on unobservable inputs and our own assumptions about how market participants would price the asset or liability in question. Inputs into the determination of fair value of our portfolio investments require significant management judgment or estimation. Even if observable market data is available, such information may be the result of consensus pricing information or broker quotes, which include a disclaimer that the broker would not be held to such a price in an actual transaction. The non-binding nature of consensus pricing and/or quotes accompanied by disclaimers materially reduces the reliability of such information. We have retained the services of independent service providers to review the valuation of these loans and securities. The types of factors that the board of directors may take into account in determining the fair value of our investments generally include, as appropriate, comparison to publicly traded securities including such factors as yield, maturity and measures of credit quality, the enterprise value of a portfolio company, the nature and realizable value of any collateral, the portfolio company's ability to make payments and its earnings and discounted cash flow, the markets in which the portfolio company does business and other relevant factors. Because such valuations, and particularly valuations of private securities and private companies, are inherently uncertain, may fluctuate over short periods of time and may be based on estimates, our determinations of fair value may differ materially from the values that would have been used if a ready market for these loans and securities existed. Our net asset value could be adversely affected if our determinations regarding the fair value of our investments were materially higher than the values that we ultimately realize upon the disposal of such loans and securities.

We adjust quarterly the valuation of our portfolio to reflect our board of directors' determination of the fair value of each investment in our portfolio. Any changes in fair value are recorded in our statement of operations as net change in unrealized appreciation or depreciation.

**We may expose ourselves to risks if we engage in hedging transactions.**

We may utilize instruments such as forward contracts, currency options and interest rate swaps, caps, collars and floors to seek to hedge against fluctuations in the relative values of our portfolio positions from changes in currency

exchange rates and market interest rates. Use of these hedging instruments may expose us to counter-party credit risk. Hedging against a decline in the values of our portfolio positions does not eliminate the possibility of fluctuations in the values of such positions or prevent losses if the values of such positions decline. However, such hedging can establish other positions designed to gain from those same developments, thereby offsetting the decline in the value of such portfolio positions. Such hedging transactions may also limit the opportunity for gain if the values of the portfolio positions should increase. Moreover, it may not be possible to hedge against an exchange rate or interest rate fluctuation that is generally anticipated at an acceptable price.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**We are an emerging growth company under the JOBS Act, and we cannot be certain if the reduced disclosure requirements applicable to emerging growth companies will make our common stock less attractive to investors.**

We are and we will remain an emerging growth company as defined in the JOBS Act until the earlier of (a) the last day of the fiscal year (i) following the fifth anniversary of the completion of our initial public offering on November 13, 2012, (ii) in which we have total annual gross revenue of at least \$1.0 billion, or (iii) in which we are deemed to be a large accelerated filer, which means the market value of our common stock that is held by non-affiliates exceeds \$700 million as of the prior June 30<sup>th</sup>, and (b) the date on which we have issued more than \$1.0 billion in non-convertible debt during the prior three-year period. For so long as we remain an emerging growth company we may take advantage of certain exemptions from various reporting requirements that are applicable to other public companies that are not emerging growth companies including, but not limited to, not being required to comply with the auditor attestation requirements of Section 404 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. We cannot predict if investors will find our common stock less attractive because we will rely on some or all of these exemptions. If some investors find our common stock less attractive as a result, there may be a less active trading market for our common stock and our stock price may be more volatile.

In addition, Section 107 of the JOBS Act also provides that an emerging growth company can take advantage of the extended transition period provided in Section 7(a)(2)(B) of the Securities Act for complying with new or revised accounting standards. In other words, an emerging growth company can delay the adoption of certain accounting standards until those standards would otherwise apply to private companies. We are choosing to take advantage of the extended transition period for complying with new or revised accounting standards, which may make it more difficult for investors and securities analysts to evaluate us since our financial statements may not be comparable to companies that comply with public company effective dates and may result in less investor confidence.

We will no longer qualify as an emerging growth company beginning January 1, 2017.

**Our status as an emerging growth company under the JOBS Act may make it more difficult to raise capital as and when we need it.**

Because of the exemptions from various reporting requirements provided to us as an emerging growth company and because we will have an extended transition period for complying with new or revised financial accounting standards, we may be less attractive to investors and it may be difficult for us to raise additional capital as and when we need it.

Investors may be unable to compare our business with other companies in our industry if they believe that our financial accounting is not as transparent as other companies in our industry. If we are unable to raise additional capital as and when we need it, our financial condition and results of operations may be materially and adversely affected.

**If we fail to maintain an effective system of internal control over financial reporting, we may not be able to accurately report our financial results or prevent fraud. As a result, stockholders could lose confidence in our financial and other public reporting, which would harm our business and the trading price of our common stock.**



Effective internal controls over financial reporting are necessary for us to provide reliable financial reports and, together with adequate disclosure controls and procedures, are designed to prevent fraud. Any failure to implement required new or improved controls, or difficulties encountered in their implementation could cause us to fail to meet our reporting obligations. In addition, any testing by us conducted in connection with Section 404 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, or the subsequent testing by our independent registered public accounting firm (when undertaken, as noted below), may reveal deficiencies in our internal controls over financial reporting that are deemed to be material weaknesses or that may require prospective or retroactive changes to our consolidated financial statements or identify other areas for further attention or improvement. Inferior internal controls could also cause investors to lose confidence in our reported financial information, which could have a negative effect on the trading price of our common stock.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

We are required to disclose changes made in our internal control and procedures on a quarterly basis and our management is required to assess the effectiveness of these controls annually. However, for as long as we are an emerging growth company under the recently enacted JOBS Act, our independent registered public accounting firm will not be required to attest to the effectiveness of our internal control over financial reporting pursuant to Section 404. We could be an emerging growth company for up to five years. An independent assessment of the effectiveness of our internal controls could detect problems that our management's assessment might not. Undetected material weaknesses in our internal controls could lead to financial statement restatements and require us to incur the expense of remediation.

### **New or modified laws or regulations governing our operations may adversely affect our business.**

We and our portfolio companies are subject to regulation by laws at the U.S. federal, state and local levels. These laws and regulations, as well as their interpretation, may change from time to time, and new laws, regulations and interpretations may also come into effect. Any such new or changed laws or regulations could have a material adverse effect on our business.

Additionally, changes to the laws and regulations governing our operations related to permitted investments may cause us to alter our investment strategy in order to avail ourselves of new or different opportunities. Such changes could result in material differences to the strategies and plans set forth in this annual report on Form 10-K and may shift our investment focus from the areas of expertise of Stellus Capital Management to other types of investments in which Stellus Capital Management may have little or no expertise or experience. Any such changes, if they occur, could have a material adverse effect on our results of operations and the value of your investment.

### **Any failure to comply with SBA regulations could have an adverse effect on our SBIC subsidiary's operations.**

On June 20, 2014, our wholly-owned subsidiary, Stellus Capital SBIC LP, received a license from the SBA to operate as an SBIC. The SBA places certain limitations on the financing terms of investments by SBICs in portfolio companies and prohibits SBICs from providing funds for certain purposes or to businesses in a few prohibited industries. Compliance with SBIC requirements may cause our SBIC subsidiary to forgo attractive investment opportunities that are not permitted under SBA regulations.

Further, SBA regulations require that an SBIC be examined by the SBA to determine its compliance with the relevant SBA regulations at least every two years. The SBA prohibits, without prior SBA approval, a change of control of an SBIC or transfers that would result in any person (or a group of persons acting in concert) owning 10% or more of a class of capital stock of an SBIC. If our SBIC subsidiary fails to comply with applicable SBA regulations, the SBA could, depending on the severity of the violation, limit or prohibit its use of debentures, declare outstanding debentures immediately due and payable, and/or limit it from making new investments. In addition, the SBA can revoke or suspend a license for willful or repeated violation of, or willful or repeated failure to observe, any provision of the Small Business Investment Act of 1958 or any rule or regulation promulgated thereunder. These actions by the SBA would, in turn, negatively affect us because our SBIC subsidiary is our wholly-owned subsidiary.

## **Risks Related to Our Operations**

**Because we intend to distribute substantially all of our income to our stockholders to obtain and maintain our status as a RIC, we will continue to need additional capital to finance our growth. If additional funds are unavailable or not available on favorable terms, our ability to grow may be impaired.**

We will need additional capital to fund new investments and grow our portfolio of investments. We intend to access the capital markets periodically to issue debt or equity securities or borrow from financial institutions in order to obtain such additional capital. Unfavorable economic conditions could increase our funding costs, limit our access to the capital markets or result in a decision by lenders not to extend credit to us. A reduction in the availability of new capital could limit our ability to grow. In addition, we are required to distribute at least 90% of our net ordinary income and net short-term capital gains in excess of net long-term capital losses, if any, to our stockholders to maintain our qualification as a RIC. As a result, these earnings will not be available to fund new investments. An inability on our part to access the capital markets

TABLE OF CONTENTS

successfully could limit our ability to grow our business and execute our business strategy fully and could decrease our earnings, if any, which would have an adverse effect on the value of our shares of common stock.

As a BDC, we are required to meet a coverage ratio of total assets, less liabilities and indebtedness not represented by senior securities and excluding SBA-guaranteed debentures as permitted by exemptive relief obtained from the SEC, to total senior securities, which includes all of our borrowings with the exception of SBA-guaranteed debentures, of at least 200.0%. This requirement limits the amount that we may borrow. Since we continue to need capital to grow our investment portfolio, these limitations may prevent us from incurring debt and require us to raise additional equity at a time when it may be disadvantageous to do so. While we expect that we will be able to borrow and to issue additional debt securities and expect that we will be able to issue additional equity securities, which would in turn increase the equity capital available to us, we cannot assure you that debt and equity financing will be available to us on favorable terms, or at all. In addition, as a BDC, we generally are not permitted to issue equity securities priced below net asset value without stockholder approval. If additional funds are not available us, we may be forced to curtail or cease new investment activities, and our net asset value could decline.

**Our wholly-owned SBIC subsidiary may be unable to make distributions to us that will enable us to maintain RIC status, which could result in the imposition of an entity-level tax.**

In order for us to continue to qualify for RIC tax treatment and to minimize corporate-level taxes, we are required to distribute substantially all of our net taxable income and net capital gain income, including income from certain of our subsidiaries, which includes the income from our SBIC subsidiary. We are partially dependent on our SBIC subsidiary for cash distributions to enable us to meet the RIC distribution requirements. Our SBIC subsidiary may be limited by the Small Business Investment Act of 1958, and SBA regulations governing SBICs, from making certain distributions to us that may be necessary to maintain our status as a RIC. We may have to request a waiver of the SBA's restrictions for our SBIC subsidiary to make certain distributions to maintain our RIC status. We cannot assure you that the SBA will grant such waiver and if our SBIC subsidiary is unable to obtain a waiver, compliance with the SBA regulations may result in loss of RIC tax treatment and a consequent imposition of an entity-level tax on us.

**Our ability to enter into transactions with our affiliates will be restricted, which may limit the scope of investments available to us.**

We are prohibited under the 1940 Act from participating in certain transactions with our affiliates without the prior approval of our independent directors and, in some cases, the SEC. Any person that owns, directly or indirectly, 5% or more of our outstanding voting securities will be our affiliate for purposes of the 1940 Act, and we are generally prohibited from buying or selling any security from or to such affiliate without the prior approval of our independent directors. The 1940 Act also prohibits certain joint transactions with certain of our affiliates, which could include concurrent investments in the same portfolio company, without prior approval of our independent directors and, in some cases, of the SEC. We are prohibited from buying or selling any security from or to any person that controls us or who owns more than 25% of our voting securities or certain of that person's affiliates, or entering into prohibited joint transactions with such persons, absent the prior approval of the SEC. As a result of these restrictions, we may be prohibited from buying or selling any security (other than any security of which we are the issuer) from or to any portfolio company of a private fund managed by Stellus Capital Management or its affiliates without the prior approval of the SEC, which may limit the scope of investment opportunities that would otherwise be available to us.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

We have received exemptive relief from the SEC to co-invest with investment funds managed by Stellus Capital Management (other than the D. E. Shaw group funds, as defined below) where doing so is consistent with our investment strategy as well as applicable law (including the terms and conditions of the exemptive order issued by the SEC). Under the terms of the relief permitting us to co-invest with other funds managed by Stellus Capital Management, a required majority (as defined in Section 57(o) of the 1940 Act) of our independent directors must make certain conclusions in connection with a co-investment transaction, including that (1) the terms of the proposed transaction, including the consideration to be paid, are reasonable and fair to us and our stockholders and do not involve overreaching of us or our stockholders on the part of any person concerned and (2) the transaction is consistent with the interests of our stockholders and is consistent with our investment objectives and strategies.

### **The involvement of our interested directors in the valuation process may create conflicts of interest.**

We make many of our portfolio investments in the form of loans and securities that are not publicly traded and for which no market based price quotation is available. As a result, our board of directors determines the fair value of these loans and securities in good faith as described elsewhere in this annual report on Form 10-K. In connection with that determination, investment professionals from Stellus Capital Management may provide our board of directors with valuations based upon the most recent portfolio company financial statements available and projected financial results of each portfolio company. While the valuation for each portfolio investment is reviewed by an independent valuation firm at least twice annually, the ultimate determination of fair value is made by our board of directors, including our interested directors, and not by such third party valuation firm. In addition, Messrs. Ladd, D Angelo and Davis, each an interested member of our board of directors, has a direct pecuniary interest in Stellus Capital Management. The participation of Stellus Capital Management's investment professionals in our valuation process, and the pecuniary interest in Stellus Capital Management by certain members of our board of directors, could result in a conflict of interest as Stellus Capital Management's management fee is based, in part, on the value of our gross assets, and incentive fees are based, in part, on realized gains and realized and unrealized losses.

### **There are conflicts related to other arrangements with Stellus Capital Management.**

We have entered into a license agreement with Stellus Capital Management under which Stellus Capital Management has agreed to grant us a non-exclusive, royalty-free license to use the name Stellus Capital. In addition, we have entered into an administration agreement with Stellus Capital Management pursuant to which we are required to pay to Stellus Capital Management our allocable portion of overhead and other expenses incurred by Stellus Capital Management in performing its obligations under such administration agreement, such as rent and our allocable portion of the cost of our chief financial officer and chief compliance officer and his staff. This will create conflicts of interest that our board of directors will monitor. For example, under the terms of the license agreement, we will be unable to preclude Stellus Capital Management from licensing or transferring the ownership of the Stellus Capital name to third parties, some of whom may compete against us. Consequently, we will be unable to prevent any damage to goodwill that may occur as a result of the activities of Stellus Capital Management or others. Furthermore, in the event the license agreement is terminated, we will be required to change our name and cease using Stellus Capital as part of our name. Any of these events could disrupt our recognition in the market place, damage any goodwill we may have generated and otherwise harm our business.

**The investment advisory agreement and the administration agreement with Stellus Capital Management were not negotiated on an arm's length basis and may not be as favorable to us as if they had been negotiated with an unaffiliated third party.**

The investment advisory agreement and the administration agreement were negotiated between related parties. Consequently, their terms, including fees payable to Stellus Capital Management, may not be as favorable to us as if they had been negotiated with an unaffiliated third party. In addition, we may choose not to enforce, or to enforce less vigorously, our rights and remedies under these agreements because of our desire to maintain our ongoing relationship with Stellus Capital Management and its affiliates. Any such decision, however, would breach our fiduciary obligations to our stockholders.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**The time and resources that Stellus Capital Management devote to us may be diverted, and we may face additional competition due to the fact that Stellus Capital Management and its affiliates are not prohibited from raising money for, or managing, another entity that makes the same types of investments that we target.**

Stellus Capital Management and some of its affiliates, including our officers and our non-independent directors, are not prohibited from raising money for, or managing, another investment entity that makes the same types of investments as those we target. For example, Stellus Capital Management currently manages a private credit fund that will have an investment strategy that is identical to our investment strategy and with which we intend to co-invest. In addition, pursuant to sub-advisory arrangements, Stellus Capital Management provides non-discretionary advisory services to the D. E. Shaw group related to a private investment fund and a strategy of a private multi-strategy investment fund to which the D. E. Shaw group serves as investment adviser. As a result, the time and resources they could devote to us may be diverted. In addition, we may compete with any such investment entity for the same investors and investment opportunities.

**Our incentive fee arrangements with Stellus Capital Management may vary from those of other investment funds, account or investment vehicles managed by Stellus Capital Management, which may create an incentive for Stellus Capital Management to devote time and resources to a higher fee-paying fund.**

If Stellus Capital Management is paid a higher performance-based fee from any of its other funds, it may have an incentive to devote more research and development or other activities, and/or recommend the allocation of investment opportunities, to such higher fee-paying fund. For example, to the extent Stellus Capital Management's incentive compensation is not subject to a hurdle or total return requirement with respect to another fund, it may have an incentive to devote time and resources to such other fund.

**Stellus Capital Management's liability is limited under the investment advisory agreement and we have agreed to indemnify Stellus Capital Management against certain liabilities, which may lead Stellus Capital Management to act in a riskier manner on our behalf than it would when acting for its own account.**

Under the investment advisory agreement, Stellus Capital Management has not assumed any responsibility to us other than to render the services called for under that agreement. It will not be responsible for any action of our board of directors in following or declining to follow Stellus Capital Management's advice or recommendations. Under the investment advisory agreement, Stellus Capital Management, its officers, members and personnel, and any person controlling or controlled by Stellus Capital Management will not be liable to us, any subsidiary of ours, our directors, our stockholders or any subsidiary's stockholders or partners for acts or omissions performed in accordance with and pursuant to the investment advisory agreement, except those resulting from acts constituting gross negligence, willful misfeasance, bad faith or reckless disregard of the duties that Stellus Capital Management owes to us under the investment advisory agreement. In addition, as part of the investment advisory agreement, we have agreed to indemnify Stellus Capital Management and each of its officers, directors, members, managers and employees from and against any claims or liabilities, including reasonable legal fees and other expenses reasonably incurred, arising



out of or in connection with our business and operations or any action taken or omitted on our behalf pursuant to authority granted by the investment advisory agreement, except where attributable to gross negligence, willful misfeasance, bad faith or reckless disregard of such person's duties under the investment advisory agreement. These protections may lead Stellus Capital Management to act in a riskier manner when acting on our behalf than it would when acting for its own account.

**Stellus Capital Management can resign as our investment adviser or administrator upon 60 days' notice and we may not be able to find a suitable replacement within that time, or at all, resulting in a disruption in our operations that could adversely affect our financial condition, business and results of operations.**

Stellus Capital Management has the right under the investment advisory agreement to resign as our investment adviser at any time upon 60 days' written notice, whether we have found a replacement or not. Similarly, Stellus Capital Management has the right under the administration agreement to resign at any time upon 60 days' written notice, whether we have found a replacement or not. If Stellus Capital Management was to resign, we may not be able to find a new investment adviser or administrator or hire internal management with similar expertise and ability to provide the same or equivalent services on acceptable terms

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

within 60 days, or at all. If we are unable to do so quickly, our operations are likely to experience a disruption, our financial condition, business and results of operations as well as our ability to pay distributions to our stockholders are likely to be adversely affected and the market price of our shares may decline. In addition, the coordination of our internal management and investment or administrative activities, as applicable, is likely to suffer if we are unable to identify and reach an agreement with a single institution or group of executives having the expertise possessed by Stellus Capital Management. Even if we are able to retain comparable management, whether internal or external, the integration of such management and their lack of familiarity with our investment objective may result in additional costs and time delays that may adversely affect our business, financial condition, results of operations and cash flows.

### **If we fail to maintain our status as a BDC, our business and operating flexibility could be significantly reduced.**

We qualify as a BDC under the 1940 Act. The 1940 Act imposes numerous constraints on the operations of BDCs. For example, BDCs are required to invest at least 70.0% of their total assets in specified types of securities, primarily in private companies or thinly-traded U.S. public companies, cash, cash equivalents, U.S. government securities and other high quality debt investments that mature in one year or less. Failure to comply with the requirements imposed on BDCs by the 1940 Act could cause the SEC to bring an enforcement action against us and/or expose us to claims of private litigants. In addition, upon approval of a majority of our stockholders, we may elect to withdraw their respective election as a BDC. If we decide to withdraw our election, or if we otherwise fail to qualify, or maintain our qualification, as a BDC, we may be subject to the substantially greater regulation under the 1940 Act as a closed-end investment company. Compliance with these regulations would significantly decrease our operating flexibility and could significantly increase our cost of doing business.

### **If we do not invest a sufficient portion of our assets in qualifying assets, we could fail to maintain our qualification as a BDC or be precluded from investing according to our current business strategy.**

As a BDC, we may not acquire any assets other than qualifying assets unless, at the time of and after giving effect to such acquisition, at least 70% of our total assets are qualifying assets.

We believe that most of the investments that we may acquire in the future will constitute qualifying assets. However, we may be precluded from investing in what we believe to be attractive investments if such investments are not qualifying assets for purposes of the 1940 Act. If we do not invest a sufficient portion of our assets in qualifying assets, we could violate the 1940 Act provisions applicable to BDCs. As a result of such violation, specific rules under the 1940 Act could prevent us, for example, from making follow-on investments in existing portfolio companies (which could result in the dilution of our position).

If we do not maintain our status as a BDC, we would be subject to regulation as a registered closed-end investment company under the 1940 Act. As a registered closed-end investment company, we would be subject to substantially more regulatory restrictions under the 1940 Act which would significantly decrease our operating flexibility.

### **We may experience fluctuations in our annual and quarterly operating results.**

We could experience fluctuations in our annual and quarterly operating results due to a number of factors, including the interest rate payable on the loans and debt securities we acquire, the default rate on such loans and securities, the level of our expenses, variations in and the timing of the recognition of realized and unrealized gains or losses, the

degree to which we encounter competition in our markets and general economic conditions. In light of these factors, results for any period should not be relied upon as being indicative of performance in future periods.

**Our board of directors may change our investment objective, operating policies and strategies without prior notice or stockholder approval.**

Our board of directors has the authority, except as otherwise provided in the 1940 Act, to modify or waive certain of our operating policies and strategies without prior notice and without stockholder approval. However, absent stockholder approval, we may not change the nature of our business so as to cease to be, or

TABLE OF CONTENTS

withdraw our election as, a BDC. We cannot predict the effect any changes to our current operating policies and strategies would have on our business, operating results and the market price of our common stock. Nevertheless, any such changes could adversely affect our business and impair our ability to make distributions to our stockholders.

**Pending legislation may allow us to incur additional leverage.**

As a BDC under the 1940 Act, we are generally not permitted to incur indebtedness unless immediately after such borrowing we have an asset coverage for total borrowings of at least 200% (i.e., the amount of debt may not exceed 50% of the value of our assets). Legislation introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives would modify this section of the 1940 Act and increased the amount of debt that BDCs may incur by modifying the asset coverage percentage from 200% to 150%. As a result, we may be able to incur additional indebtedness in the future and therefore your risk of an investment in our common stock may increase.

**Our board of directors is authorized to reclassify any unissued shares of common stock into one or more classes of preferred stock, which could convey special rights and privileges to its owners.**

Under Maryland General Corporation Law and our charter, our board of directors is authorized to classify and reclassify any authorized but unissued shares of stock into one or more classes of stock, including preferred stock. Prior to issuance of shares of each class or series, the board of directors will be required by Maryland law and our charter to set the terms, preferences, conversion or other rights, voting powers, restrictions, limitations as to stockholder distributions, qualifications and terms or conditions of redemption for each class or series. Thus, the board of directors could authorize the issuance of shares of preferred stock with terms and conditions which could have the effect of delaying, deferring or preventing a transaction or a change in control that might involve a premium price for holders of our common stock or that otherwise might be in their best interest. The cost of any such reclassification would be borne by our common stockholders. Certain matters under the 1940 Act require the separate vote of the holders of any issued and outstanding preferred stock. For example, the 1940 Act provides that holders of preferred stock are entitled to vote separately from holders of common stock to elect two preferred stock directors. We currently have no plans to issue preferred stock. The issuance of preferred shares convertible into shares of common stock may also reduce the net income and net asset value per share of our common stock upon conversion, provided, that we will only be permitted to issue such convertible preferred stock to the extent we comply with the requirements of Section 61 of the 1940 Act, including obtaining common stockholder approval. These effects, among others, could have an adverse effect on your investment in our common stock.

**Provisions of the Maryland General Corporation Law and of our charter and bylaws could deter takeover attempts and have an adverse impact on the price of our common stock.**

The Maryland General Corporation Law and our charter and bylaws contain provisions that may discourage, delay or make more difficult a change in control of Stellus Capital Investment Corporation or the removal of our directors. We are subject to the Maryland Business Combination Act, subject to any applicable requirements of the 1940 Act. Our board of directors has adopted a resolution exempting from the Business Combination Act any business combination between us and any other person, subject to prior approval of such business combination by our board of directors, including approval by a majority of our independent directors. If the resolution exempting business combinations is repealed or our board of directors does not approve a business combination, the Business Combination Act may discourage third parties from trying to acquire control of us and increase the difficulty of consummating such an offer.

Our board of directors may change our investment objective, operating policies and strategies without prior notice or

Our bylaws exempt from the Maryland Control Share Acquisition Act acquisitions of our stock by any person. If we amend our bylaws to repeal the exemption from the Control Share Acquisition Act, the Control Share Acquisition Act also may make it more difficult for a third party to obtain control of us and increase the difficulty of consummating such a transaction.

We have also adopted measures that may make it difficult for a third party to obtain control of us, including provisions of our charter classifying our board of directors in three classes serving staggered three-year terms, and authorizing our board of directors to classify or reclassify shares of our stock in one or more classes or series, to cause the issuance of additional shares of our stock, to amend our charter without stockholder approval and to increase or decrease the number of shares of stock that we have authority to

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

issue. These provisions, as well as other provisions of our charter and bylaws, may delay, defer or prevent a transaction or a change in control that might otherwise be in the best interests of our stockholders.

**We are highly dependent on information systems and systems failures could significantly disrupt our business, which may, in turn, negatively affect the market price of our common stock and our ability to make distributions to our stockholders.**

Our business is highly dependent on the communications and information systems of Stellus Capital Management. In addition, certain of these systems are provided to Stellus Capital Management by third party service providers. Any failure or interruption of such systems, including as a result of the termination of an agreement with any such third party service provider, could cause delays or other problems in our activities. This, in turn, could have a material adverse effect on our operating results and negatively affect the market price of our common stock and our ability to make distributions to our stockholders.

**The failure in cyber security systems, as well as the occurrence of events unanticipated in the Company's disaster recovery systems and management continuity planning could impair the Company's ability to conduct business effectively.**

The occurrence of a disaster such as a cyber attack, a natural catastrophe, an industrial accident, a terrorist attack or war, events unanticipated in the Company's disaster recovery systems, or a support failure from external providers, could have an adverse effect on the Company's ability to conduct business and on the Company's results of operations and financial condition, particularly if those events affect the Company's computer-based data processing, transmission, storage, and retrieval systems or destroy data. If a significant number of the Company's managers were unavailable in the event of a disaster, the Company's ability to effectively conduct its business could be severely compromised.

We depend heavily upon computer systems to perform necessary business functions. Despite the Company's implementation of a variety of security measures, its computer systems could be subject to cyber attacks and unauthorized access, such as physical and electronic break-ins or unauthorized tampering. Like other companies, the Company may experience threats to its data and systems, including malware and computer virus attacks, unauthorized access, system failures and disruptions. If one or more of these events occurs, it could potentially jeopardize the confidential, proprietary and other information processed and stored in, and transmitted through, the Company's computer systems and networks, or otherwise cause interruptions or malfunctions in its operations, which could result in damage to our reputation, financial losses, litigation, increased costs, regulatory penalties and/or customer dissatisfaction or loss.

## **Risks Related to Economic Conditions**

**Global economic, political and market conditions may adversely affect our business, results of operations and financial condition, including our revenue growth and profitability.**

We are highly dependent on information systems and systems failures could significantly disrupt our business, which

The U.S. and global capital markets experienced extreme volatility and disruption during the economic downturn that began in mid-2007, and the U.S. economy was in a recession for several consecutive calendar quarters during the same period. In 2010, a financial crisis emerged in Europe, triggered by high budget deficits and rising direct and contingent sovereign debt, which created concerns about the ability of certain nations to continue to service their sovereign debt obligations. Risks resulting from such debt crisis and any future debt crisis in Europe or any similar crisis elsewhere could have a detrimental impact on the global economic recovery, sovereign and non-sovereign debt in certain countries and the financial condition of financial institutions generally. In July and August 2015, Greece reached agreements with its creditors for bailouts that provide aid in exchange for certain austerity measures. These and similar austerity measures may adversely affect world economic conditions and have an adverse impact on our business and that of our portfolio companies. In the second quarter of 2015, stock prices in China experienced a significant drop, resulting primarily from continued sell-off of shares trading in Chinese markets. In August 2015, Chinese authorities sharply devalued China's currency.

In June 2016, the United Kingdom held a referendum in which voters approved an exit from the European Union, and the implications of the United Kingdom's pending withdrawal from the European Union are unclear at present. In November 2016, voters in the United States elected a new president and the

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

implications of a new presidential administration are unclear at present. These market and economic disruptions affected, and these and other similar market and economic disruptions may in the future affect, the U.S. capital markets, which could adversely affect our business and that of our portfolio companies and the broader financial and credit markets and have reduced the availability of debt and equity capital for the market as a whole and to financial firms, in particular. At various times, these disruptions resulted in, and may in the future result, a lack of liquidity in parts of the debt capital markets, significant write-offs in the financial services sector and the repricing of credit risk.

These conditions may reoccur for a prolonged period of time again or materially worsen in the future, including as a result of U.S. government shutdowns or further downgrades to the U.S. government's sovereign credit rating or the perceived credit worthiness of the United States or other large global economies. Unfavorable economic conditions, including future recessions, also could increase our funding costs, limit our access to the capital markets or result in a decision by lenders not to extend credit to us. We may in the future have difficulty accessing debt and equity capital on attractive terms, or at all, and a severe disruption and instability in the global financial markets or deteriorations in credit and financing conditions may cause us to reduce the volume of loans we originate and/or fund, adversely affect the value of our portfolio investments or otherwise have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition, results of operations and cash flows.

## **Risks Related to our Investments**

### **Economic recessions or downturns could impair our portfolio companies, which would harm our operating results.**

Many of the portfolio companies in which we make, and expect to make, investments, including those currently included in our portfolio, are likely to be susceptible to economic slowdowns or recessions and may be unable to repay our loans during such periods. Therefore, the number of our non-performing assets is likely to increase and the value of our portfolio is likely to decrease during such periods. Adverse economic conditions may decrease the value of collateral securing some of our loans and debt securities and the value of our equity investments. Economic slowdowns or recessions could lead to financial losses in our portfolio and a decrease in revenues, net income and assets. Unfavorable economic conditions also could increase our funding costs, limit our access to the capital markets or result in a decision by lenders not to extend credit to us. These events could prevent us from increasing our investments and harm our operating results.

A portfolio company's failure to satisfy financial or operating covenants imposed by us or other lenders could lead to defaults and, potentially, termination of its loans and foreclosure on its assets, which could trigger cross-defaults under other agreements and jeopardize our portfolio company's ability to meet its obligations under the loans and debt securities that we hold. We may incur expenses to the extent necessary to seek recovery upon default or to negotiate new terms with a defaulting portfolio company. In addition, lenders in certain cases can be subject to lender liability claims for actions taken by them when they become too involved in the borrower's business or exercise control over a borrower. It is possible that we could become subject to a lender's liability claim, including as a result of actions taken if we render significant managerial assistance to the borrower. Furthermore, if one of our portfolio companies were to file for bankruptcy protection, a bankruptcy court might re-characterize our debt holding and subordinate all or a portion of our claim to claims of other creditors, even though we may have structured our investment as senior secured debt. The likelihood of such a re-characterization would depend on the facts and circumstances, including the extent to which we provided managerial assistance to that portfolio company.



**Our investments in leveraged portfolio companies may be risky, and we could lose all or part of our investment.**

Investment in leveraged companies involves a number of significant risks. Leveraged companies in which we invest may have limited financial resources and may be unable to meet their obligations under their loans and debt securities that we hold. Such developments may be accompanied by a deterioration in the value of any collateral and a reduction in the likelihood of our realizing any guarantees that we may have obtained in connection with our investment. Smaller leveraged companies also may have less predictable operating results and may require substantial additional capital to support their operations, finance their expansion or maintain their competitive position.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**We may hold the loans and debt securities of leveraged companies that may, due to the significant operating volatility typical of such companies, enter into bankruptcy proceedings.**

Leveraged companies may experience bankruptcy or similar financial distress. The bankruptcy process has a number of significant inherent risks. Many events in a bankruptcy proceeding are the product of contested matters and adversary proceedings and are beyond the control of the creditors. A bankruptcy filing by a portfolio company may adversely and permanently affect that company. If the proceeding is converted to a liquidation, the value of the portfolio company may not equal the liquidation value that was believed to exist at the time of the investment. The duration of a bankruptcy proceeding is also difficult to predict, and a creditor's return on investment can be adversely affected by delays until the plan of reorganization or liquidation ultimately becomes effective. The administrative costs in connection with a bankruptcy proceeding are frequently high and would be paid out of the debtor's estate prior to any return to creditors. Because the standards for classification of claims under bankruptcy law are vague, our influence with respect to the class of securities or other obligations we own may be lost by increases in the number and amount of claims in the same class or by different classification and treatment. In the early stages of the bankruptcy process, it is often difficult to estimate the extent of, or even to identify, any contingent claims that might be made. In addition, certain claims that have priority by law (for example, claims for taxes) may be substantial.

**Our investments in private and middle-market portfolio companies are risky, and we could lose all or part of our investment.**

Investment in private and middle-market companies involves a number of significant risks. Generally, little public information exists about these companies, and we rely on the ability of Stellus Capital Management's investment professionals to obtain adequate information to evaluate the potential returns from investing in these companies. If we are unable to uncover all material information about these companies, we may not make a fully informed investment decision, and we may lose money on our investments. Middle-market companies may have limited financial resources and may be unable to meet their obligations under their loans and debt securities that we hold, which may be accompanied by a deterioration in the value of any collateral and a reduction in the likelihood of our realizing any guarantees we may have obtained in connection with our investment. In addition, such companies typically have shorter operating histories, narrower product lines and smaller market shares than larger businesses, which tend to render them more vulnerable to competitors' actions and market conditions, as well as general economic downturns. Additionally, middle-market companies are more likely to depend on the management talents and efforts of a small group of persons. Therefore, the death, disability, resignation or termination of one or more of these persons could have a material adverse impact on one or more of the portfolio companies we invest in and, in turn, on us. Middle-market companies also may be parties to litigation and may be engaged in rapidly changing businesses with products subject to a substantial risk of obsolescence. In addition, our executive officers, directors and investment adviser may, in the ordinary course of business, be named as defendants in litigation arising from our investments in portfolio companies.

**The lack of liquidity in our investments may adversely affect our business.**

Most of our assets are invested in illiquid loans and securities, and a substantial portion of our investments in leveraged companies are subject to legal and other restrictions on resale or are otherwise less liquid than more broadly traded public securities. The illiquidity of these investments may make it difficult for us to sell such investments if the need arises. In addition, if we are required to liquidate all or a portion of our portfolio quickly, we may realize significantly less than the value at which we have previously recorded our investments. Also, as noted above, we may

be limited or prohibited in our ability to sell or otherwise exit certain positions in our portfolio as such a transaction could be considered a joint transaction prohibited by the 1940 Act.

47

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Price declines and illiquidity in the corporate debt markets may adversely affect the fair value of our portfolio investments, reducing our net asset value through increased net unrealized depreciation.**

As a BDC, we are required to carry our investments at market value or, if no market value is ascertainable, at fair value as determined in good faith by our board of directors. As part of the valuation process, we may take into account the following types of factors, if relevant, in determining the fair value of our investments:

available current market data, including relevant and applicable market trading and transaction comparables;  
applicable market yields and multiples;  
security covenants;  
call protection provisions;  
information rights;  
the nature and realizable value of any collateral;

the portfolio company's ability to make payments, its earnings and discounted cash flows and the markets in which it does business;

comparisons of financial ratios of peer companies that are public;  
comparable merger and acquisition transactions; and  
the principal market and enterprise values.

When an external event such as a purchase transaction, public offering or subsequent equity sale occurs, we use the pricing indicated by the external event to corroborate our valuation. We record decreases in the market values or fair values of our investments as unrealized depreciation. Declines in prices and liquidity in the corporate debt markets may result in significant net unrealized depreciation in our portfolio. The effect of all of these factors on our portfolio may reduce our net asset value by increasing net unrealized depreciation in our portfolio. Depending on market conditions, we could incur substantial realized losses and may suffer additional unrealized losses in future periods, which could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition, results of operations and cash flows.

**We are a non-diversified investment company within the meaning of the 1940 Act, and therefore we are not limited with respect to the proportion of our assets that may be invested in securities of a single issuer.**

We are classified as a non-diversified investment company within the meaning of the 1940 Act, which means that we are not limited by the 1940 Act with respect to the proportion of our assets that we may invest in securities of a single issuer. Beyond the asset diversification requirements associated with our qualification as a RIC under the Code, we do not have fixed guidelines for diversification. To the extent that we assume large positions in the securities of a small number of issuers or our investments are concentrated in relatively few industries, our net asset value may fluctuate to a greater extent than that of a diversified investment company as a result of changes in the financial condition or the market's assessment of the issuer. We may also be more susceptible to any single economic or regulatory occurrence than a diversified investment company.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Our failure to make follow-on investments in our portfolio companies could impair the value of our portfolio.**

Following an initial investment in a portfolio company, we may make additional investments in that portfolio company as follow-on investments, in seeking to:

increase or maintain in whole or in part our position as a creditor or equity ownership percentage in a portfolio company;

exercise warrants, options or convertible securities that were acquired in the original or subsequent financing; or  
preserve or enhance the value of our investment.

We have discretion to make follow-on investments, subject to the availability of capital resources. Failure on our part to make follow-on investments may, in some circumstances, jeopardize the continued viability of a portfolio company and our initial investment, or may result in a missed opportunity for us to increase our participation in a successful operation. Even if we have sufficient capital to make a desired follow-on investment, we may elect not to make a follow-on investment because we may not want to increase our level of risk, because we prefer other opportunities or because we are inhibited by compliance with BDC requirements of the 1940 Act or the desire to maintain our qualification as a RIC. Our ability to make follow-on investments may also be limited by our compliance with the conditions under the exemptive relief order we received from the SEC related to co-investments with investment funds managed by Stellus Capital Management or Stellus Capital Management's allocation policy.

**Because we generally do not hold controlling equity interests in our portfolio companies, we may not be able to exercise control over our portfolio companies or to prevent decisions by management of our portfolio companies that could decrease the value of our investments.**

We do not hold controlling equity positions in any of the portfolio companies included in our portfolio and, although we may do so in the future, we do not currently intend to hold controlling equity positions in our portfolio companies (including those included in our portfolio). As a result, we are subject to the risk that a portfolio company may make business decisions with which we disagree, and that the management and/or stockholders of a portfolio company may take risks or otherwise act in ways that are adverse to our interests. Due to the lack of liquidity of the debt and equity investments that we hold in our portfolio companies, we may not be able to dispose of our investments in the event we disagree with the actions of a portfolio company and may therefore suffer a decrease in the value of our investments.

**Defaults by our portfolio companies will harm our operating results.**

A portfolio company's failure to satisfy financial or operating covenants imposed by us or other lenders could lead to defaults and, potentially, termination of its loans and foreclosure on its assets. This could trigger cross-defaults under other agreements and jeopardize such portfolio company's ability to meet its obligations under the loans or debt or equity securities that we hold. We may incur expenses to the extent necessary to seek recovery upon default or to negotiate new terms, which may include the waiver of certain financial covenants, with a defaulting portfolio company.

**Prepayments of our debt investments by our portfolio companies could adversely impact our results of operations and ability to make stockholder distributions and result in a decline in the market price of our shares.**

We are subject to the risk that the debt investments we make in our portfolio companies may be repaid prior to maturity. We expect that our investments will generally allow for repayment at any time subject to certain penalties.

When this occurs, we intend to generally reinvest these proceeds in temporary investments, pending their future investment in accordance with our investment strategy. These temporary investments will typically have substantially

lower yields than the debt being prepaid, and we could experience significant delays in reinvesting these amounts. Any future investment may also be at lower yields than the debt that was repaid. As a result, our results of operations could be materially adversely affected if one or more of our portfolio companies elects to prepay amounts owed to us.

Additionally, prepayments could negatively impact

TABLE OF CONTENTS

our ability to make, or the amount of, stockholder distributions with respect to our common stock, which could result in a decline in the market price of our shares.

**Uncertainty relating to the LIBOR calculation process may adversely affect the value of our portfolio of the LIBOR-indexed, floating-rate debt securities.**

Concerns have been publicized that some of the member banks surveyed by the British Bankers' Association, or BBA, in connection with the calculation of LIBOR across a range of maturities and currencies may have been under-reporting or otherwise manipulating the inter-bank lending rate applicable to them in order to profit on their derivatives positions or to avoid an appearance of capital insufficiency or adverse reputational or other consequences that may have resulted from reporting inter-bank lending rates higher than those they actually submitted. A number of BBA member banks have entered into settlements with their regulators and law enforcement agencies with respect to alleged manipulation of LIBOR, and investigations and reviews of the framework for the setting of LIBOR by regulators and governmental authorities in various jurisdictions are ongoing. In this regard, the administration of LIBOR is now the responsibility of NYSE Euronext Rates Administration Limited.

Actions by the LIBOR Administrator, regulators or law enforcement agencies may result in changes to the manner in which LIBOR is determined. Uncertainty as to the nature of such potential changes may adversely affect the market for LIBOR-based securities, including our portfolio of LIBOR-indexed, floating-rate debt securities. In addition, any further changes or reforms to the determination or supervision of LIBOR may result in a sudden or prolonged increase or decrease in reported LIBOR, which could have an adverse impact on the market for LIBOR-based securities or the value of our portfolio of LIBOR-indexed, floating-rate debt securities.

**The effect of global climate change may impact the operations of our portfolio companies.**

There may be evidence of global climate change. Climate change creates physical and financial risk and some of our portfolio companies may be adversely affected by climate change. For example, the needs of customers of energy companies vary with weather conditions, primarily temperature and humidity. To the extent weather conditions are affected by climate change, energy use could increase or decrease depending on the duration and magnitude of any changes. Increases in the cost of energy could adversely affect the cost of operations of our portfolio companies if the use of energy products or services is material to their business. A decrease in energy use due to weather changes may affect some of our portfolio companies' financial condition, through decreased revenues. Extreme weather conditions in general require more system backup, adding to costs, and can contribute to increased system stresses, including service interruptions.

In December 2015, the United Nations, of which the U.S. is a member, adopted a climate accord with the long-term goal of limiting global warming and the short-term goal of significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As a result, our portfolio companies, particularly those operating in the energy sector, may be subject to new or strengthened regulations or legislation which could increase their operating costs and/or decrease their revenues.

**Our portfolio companies may incur debt that ranks equally with, or senior to, our investments in such companies.**

We invest a portion of our capital in second lien and subordinated loans issued by our portfolio companies. The portfolio companies usually have, or may be permitted to incur, other debt that ranks equally with, or senior to, the

Uncertainty relating to the LIBOR calculation process may adversely affect the value of our portfolio of the LIBOR-indexed, floating-rate debt securities.

loans in which we invest. By their terms, such debt instruments may provide that the holders are entitled to receive payment of interest or principal on or before the dates on which we are entitled to receive payments in respect of the loans in which we invest. Also, in the event of insolvency, liquidation, dissolution, reorganization or bankruptcy of a portfolio company, holders of debt instruments ranking senior to our investment in that portfolio company would typically be entitled to receive payment in full before we receive any distribution in respect of our investment. After repaying senior creditors, a portfolio company may not have any remaining assets to use for repaying its obligation to us. In the case of debt ranking equally with loans in which we invest, we would have to share any distributions on an equal and ratable basis with other creditors holding such debt in the event of an insolvency, liquidation, dissolution, reorganization or bankruptcy of the relevant portfolio company.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Additionally, certain loans that we make to portfolio companies may be secured on a second priority basis by the same collateral securing senior secured debt of such companies. The first priority liens on the collateral will secure the portfolio company's obligations under any outstanding senior debt and may secure certain other future debt that may be permitted to be incurred by the portfolio company under the agreements governing the loans. The holders of obligations secured by first priority liens on the collateral will generally control the liquidation of, and be entitled to receive proceeds from, any realization of the collateral to repay their obligations in full before us. In addition, the value of the collateral in the event of liquidation will depend on market and economic conditions, the availability of buyers and other factors. There can be no assurance that the proceeds, if any, from sales of all of the collateral would be sufficient to satisfy the loan obligations secured by the second priority liens after payment in full of all obligations secured by the first priority liens on the collateral. If such proceeds were not sufficient to repay amounts outstanding under the loan obligations secured by the second priority liens, then we, to the extent not repaid from the proceeds of the sale of the collateral, will only have an unsecured claim against the portfolio company's remaining assets, if any.

We may also make unsecured loans to portfolio companies, meaning that such loans will not benefit from any interest in collateral of such companies. Liens on such portfolio companies' collateral, if any, will secure the portfolio company's obligations under its outstanding secured debt and may secure certain future debt that is permitted to be incurred by the portfolio company under its secured loan agreements. The holders of obligations secured by such liens will generally control the liquidation of, and be entitled to receive proceeds from, any realization of such collateral to repay their obligations in full before us. In addition, the value of such collateral in the event of liquidation will depend on market and economic conditions, the availability of buyers and other factors. There can be no assurance that the proceeds, if any, from sales of such collateral would be sufficient to satisfy our unsecured loan obligations after payment in full of all secured loan obligations. If such proceeds were not sufficient to repay the outstanding secured loan obligations, then our unsecured claims would rank equally with the unpaid portion of such secured creditors' claims against the portfolio company's remaining assets, if any.

The rights we may have with respect to the collateral securing the loans we make to our portfolio companies with senior debt outstanding may also be limited pursuant to the terms of one or more intercreditor agreements that we enter into with the holders of such senior debt. Under a typical intercreditor agreement, at any time that obligations that have the benefit of the first priority liens are outstanding, any of the following actions that may be taken in respect of the collateral will be at the direction of the holders of the obligations secured by the first priority liens:

- the ability to cause the commencement of enforcement proceedings against the collateral;
- the ability to control the conduct of such proceedings;
- the approval of amendments to collateral documents;
- releases of liens on the collateral; and
- waivers of past defaults under collateral documents.

We may not have the ability to control or direct such actions, even if our rights are adversely affected.

**If we make subordinated investments, the obligors or the portfolio companies may not generate sufficient cash flow to service their debt obligations to us.**

We may make subordinated investments that rank below other obligations of the obligor in right of payment. Subordinated investments are subject to greater risk of default than senior obligations as a result of adverse changes in the financial condition of the obligor or economic conditions in general. If we make a subordinated investment in a portfolio company, the portfolio company may be highly leveraged, and its relatively high debt-to-equity ratio may create increased risks that its operations might not generate sufficient cash flow to service all of its debt obligations.

If we make subordinated investments, the obligors or the portfolio companies may not generate sufficient cash flow



TABLE OF CONTENTS

**The disposition of our investments may result in contingent liabilities.**

Substantially all of our investments involve loans and private securities. In connection with the disposition of an investment in loans and private securities, we may be required to make representations about the business and financial affairs of the portfolio company typical of those made in connection with the sale of a business. We may also be required to indemnify the purchasers of such investment to the extent that any such representations turn out to be inaccurate or with respect to potential liabilities. These arrangements may result in contingent liabilities that ultimately result in funding obligations that we must satisfy through our return of distributions previously made to us.

**We may not realize gains from our equity investments.**

When we invest in loans and debt securities, we may acquire warrants or other equity securities of portfolio companies as well. We may also invest in equity securities directly. To the extent we hold equity investments, we will attempt to dispose of them and realize gains upon our disposition of them. However, the equity interests we receive may not appreciate in value and, may decline in value. As a result, we may not be able to realize gains from our equity interests, and any gains that we do realize on the disposition of any equity interests may not be sufficient to offset any other losses we experience.

**Risks Relating to Our Common Stock**

**There is a risk that you may not receive distributions or that our distributions may not grow over time and a portion of our distributions may be a return of capital.**

We intend to make distributions on a monthly basis to our stockholders out of assets legally available for distribution (i.e., not subject to any legal restrictions under Maryland law on the distribution thereof). We cannot assure you that we will achieve investment results that will allow us to make a specified level of cash distributions or year-to-year increases in cash distributions. All distributions will be made at the discretion of our board of directors and will depend on our earnings, financial condition, maintenance of RIC status, compliance with applicable BDC, SBA regulations and such other factors as our board of directors may deem relative from time to time. We cannot assure you that we will make distributions to our stockholders in the future.

Our ability to pay distributions might be adversely affected by the impact of one or more of the risk factors described in this annual report on Form 10-K. Due to the asset coverage test applicable to us under the 1940 Act as a BDC, we may be limited in our ability to make distributions. In addition, restrictions and provisions in our Credit Facility, the Notes and any future credit facilities, as well as in the terms of any debt securities we issue, may limit our ability to make distributions in certain circumstances.

When we make distributions, we will be required to determine the extent to which such distributions are paid out of current or accumulated earnings and profits. Distributions in excess of current and accumulated earnings and profits will be treated as a non-taxable return of capital to the extent of an investor's basis in our stock and, assuming that an investor holds our stock as a capital asset, thereafter as a capital gain.

**Stockholders may experience dilution in their ownership percentage if they do not participate in our dividend reinvestment plan.**

All distributions declared in cash payable to stockholders that are participants in our dividend reinvestment plan are generally automatically reinvested in shares of our common stock. As a result, stockholders that do not participate in the dividend reinvestment plan may experience dilution over time. Stockholders who receive distributions in shares of common stock may experience accretion to the net asset value of their shares if our shares are trading at a premium and dilution if our shares are trading at a discount. The level of accretion or discount would depend on various factors, including the proportion of our stockholders who participate in the plan, the level of premium or discount at which our shares are trading and the amount of the distribution payable to a stockholder.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Our shares might trade at premiums that are unsustainable or at discounts from net asset value.**

Shares of BDCs like us may, during some periods, trade at prices higher than their net asset value per share and, during other periods, as frequently occurs with closed-end investment companies, trade at prices lower than their net asset value per share. The perceived value of our investment portfolio may be affected by a number of factors including perceived prospects for individual companies we invest in, market conditions for common stock generally, for initial public offerings and other exit events for venture capital backed companies, and the mix of companies in our investment portfolio over time. Negative or unforeseen developments affecting the perceived value of companies in our investment portfolio could result in a decline in the trading price of our common stock relative to our net asset value per share.

The possibility that our shares will trade at a discount from net asset value or at premiums that are unsustainable are risks separate and distinct from the risk that our net asset value per share will decrease. The risk of purchasing shares of a BDC that might trade at a discount or unsustainable premium is more pronounced for investors who wish to sell their shares in a relatively short period of time because, for those investors, realization of a gain or loss on their investments is likely to be more dependent upon changes in premium or discount levels than upon increases or decreases in net asset value per share.

**Investing in our securities may involve an above average degree of risk.**

The investments we make in accordance with our investment objective may result in a higher amount of risk, and higher volatility or loss of principal, than alternative investment options. Our investments in portfolio companies may be speculative and, therefore, an investment in our securities may not be suitable for someone with lower risk tolerance.

**The market price of our securities may fluctuate significantly.**

The market price and liquidity of the market for our securities may be significantly affected by numerous factors, some of which are beyond our control and may not be directly related to our operating performance. These factors include:

significant volatility in the market price and trading volume of securities of BDCs or other companies in our sector, which is not necessarily related to the operating performance of these companies;

changes in regulatory policies or tax guidelines, particularly with respect to RICs, BDCs and SBICs;

loss of our qualification as a RIC or BDC or the status of our SBIC subsidiary as a SBIC;

changes in earnings or variations in operating results;

changes in the value of our portfolio of investments;

changes in accounting guidelines governing valuation of our investments;

any shortfall in revenue or net income or any increase in losses from levels expected by investors or securities analysts;

departure of Stellus Capital Management's key personnel;

operating performance of companies comparable to us; and

general economic trends and other external factors.

**Our investments in the financial services sector are subject to various risks including volatility and extensive government regulation.**

These risks include the effects of changes in interest rates on the profitability of financial services companies, the rate of corporate and consumer debt defaults, price competition, governmental limitations on a company's loans, other financial commitments, product lines and other operations and recent ongoing changes in the financial services industry (including consolidations, development of new products and changes to the industry's regulatory framework).

The deterioration of the credit markets starting in late 2007 generally has

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

caused an adverse impact in a broad range of markets, including U.S. and international credit and interbank money markets generally, thereby affecting a wide range of financial institutions and markets. In particular, events in the financial sector in late 2008 resulted, and may continue to result, in an unusually high degree of volatility in the financial markets, both domestic and foreign. This situation has created instability in the financial markets and caused certain financial services companies to incur large losses. Insurance companies have additional risks, such as heavy price competition, claims activity and marketing competition, and can be particularly sensitive to specific events such as man-made and natural disasters (including weather catastrophes), terrorism, mortality risks and morbidity rates.

### **Risks Relating to Our Debt Securities**

#### **The Notes are unsecured and therefore are effectively subordinated to any secured indebtedness we have incurred or may incur in the future.**

The Notes are not and will not be secured by any of our assets or any of the assets of any future subsidiaries and rank equally in right of payment of our future unsubordinated, unsecured senior indebtedness. As a result, the Notes are effectively subordinated to any secured indebtedness we or our subsidiaries have incurred and may incur in the future (or any indebtedness that is initially unsecured to which we subsequently grant security) to the extent of the value of the assets securing such indebtedness. In any liquidation, dissolution, bankruptcy or other similar proceeding, the holders of any of our existing or future secured indebtedness and the secured indebtedness of any future subsidiaries may assert rights against the assets pledged to secure that indebtedness in order to receive full payment of their indebtedness before the assets may be used to pay other creditors, including the holders of the Notes. As of December 31, 2016, we had \$116 million outstanding under the Credit Facility. The indebtedness under the Credit Facility is effectively senior to the Notes to the extent of the value of the assets securing such indebtedness.

#### **The Notes are structurally subordinated to the indebtedness and other liabilities of any future subsidiaries.**

The Notes are obligations exclusively of Stellus Capital Investment Corporation and not of our subsidiaries. None of our subsidiaries are or will be a guarantor of the Notes and the Notes are not required to be guaranteed by any subsidiaries we may acquire or create in the future. Except to the extent we are a creditor with recognized claims against our subsidiaries, all claims of creditors of our subsidiaries will have priority over our equity interests in such subsidiaries (and therefore the claims of our creditors, including holders of the Notes) with respect to the assets of such subsidiaries. Even if we are recognized as a creditor of one or more of our subsidiaries, our claims would still be effectively subordinated to any security interests in the assets of any such subsidiary and to any indebtedness or other liabilities of any such subsidiary senior to our claims. Consequently, the Notes are structurally subordinated to all indebtedness, including any future SBA-guaranteed debentures, and other liabilities of any of our subsidiaries and any subsidiaries that we may in the future acquire or establish. In addition, our subsidiaries may incur substantial additional indebtedness in the future, all of which would be structurally senior to the Notes.

#### **The indenture under which the Notes is issued contains limited protection for holders of the Notes.**

The indenture under which the Notes is issued offers limited protection to holders of the Notes. The terms of the indenture and the Notes do not restrict our or any of our subsidiaries ability to engage in, or otherwise be a party to, a variety of corporate transactions, circumstances or events that could have an adverse impact on your investment in the Notes. In particular, the terms of the indenture and the Notes do not place any restrictions on our or our subsidiaries

ability to:

issue securities or otherwise incur additional indebtedness or other obligations, including (1) any indebtedness or other obligations that would be equal in right of payment to the Notes, (2) any indebtedness or other obligations that would be secured and therefore rank effectively senior in right of payment to the Notes to the extent of the values of the assets securing such debt, (3) indebtedness of ours that is guaranteed by one or more of our subsidiaries and which therefore is structurally senior to the Notes and (4) securities, indebtedness or obligations issued or incurred by our subsidiaries or that would be senior to our equity interests in those entities and therefore rank structurally senior to the Notes with respect to the assets of our subsidiaries, in each case other than

54

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

an incurrence of indebtedness or other obligation that would cause a violation of Section 18(a)(1)(A) as modified by Section 61(a)(1) of the 1940 Act or any successor provisions, whether or not we continue to be subject to such provisions of the 1940 Act, but giving effect, in each case, to any exemptive relief granted to us by the SEC. Currently, these provisions generally prohibit us from making additional borrowings, including through the issuance of additional debt or the sale of additional debt securities, unless our asset coverage, as defined in the 1940 Act, equals at least 200% after such borrowings;

pay dividends on, or purchase or redeem or make any payments in respect of, capital stock or other securities ranking junior in right of payment to the Notes, including subordinated indebtedness, in each case other than dividends, purchases, redemptions or payments that would cause a violation of Section 18(a)(1)(B) as modified by (i) Section 61(a)(1) of the 1940 Act or any successor provisions and (ii) the exception set forth below, despite the fact that we are not currently subject to such provisions of the 1940 Act in connection with the offer and sale of the Notes, except that we will be permitted to declare a cash dividend or distribution notwithstanding the prohibition contained in Section 18(a)(1)(B) as modified by Section 61(a)(1) of the 1940 Act, but only up to such amount as is necessary in order for us to maintain our status as a regulated investment company under Subchapter M of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and, provided that, any such prohibition will not apply until such time as our asset coverage has been below the minimum asset coverage required pursuant to clause (i) above for more than six consecutive months. If Section 18(a)(1)(B) as modified by Section 61(a)(1) of the 1940 Act were currently applicable to us in connection with this offering, these provisions would generally prohibit us from declaring any cash dividend or distribution upon any class of our capital stock, or purchasing any such capital stock if our asset coverage, as defined in the 1940 Act, were below 200% at the time of the declaration of the dividend or distribution or the purchase and after deducting the amount of such dividend, distribution or purchase;

sell assets (other than certain limited restrictions on our ability to consolidate, merge or sell all or substantially all of our assets);

enter into transactions with affiliates;

create liens (including liens on the shares of our subsidiaries) or enter into sale and leaseback transactions;

make investments; or

create restrictions on the payment of dividends or other amounts to us from our subsidiaries.

In addition, the indenture does not require us to offer to purchase the Notes in connection with a change of control or any other event.

Furthermore, the terms of the indenture and the Notes do not protect holders of the Notes in the event that we experience changes (including significant adverse changes) in our financial condition, results of operations or credit ratings, as they do not require that we or our subsidiaries adhere to any financial tests or ratios or specified levels of net worth, revenues, income, cash flow, or liquidity.

Our ability to recapitalize, incur additional debt and take a number of other actions that are not limited by the terms of the Notes may have important consequences for holders of the Notes, including making it more difficult for us to satisfy our obligations with respect to the Notes or negatively affecting the trading value of the Notes.

Other debt we issue or incur in the future could contain more protections for its holders than the indenture and the Notes, including additional covenants and events of default. For example, the indenture under which the Notes is issued does not contain cross-default provisions that are contained in the Credit Facility. The issuance or incurrence of any such debt with incremental protections could affect the market for and trading levels and prices of the Notes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**An active trading market for the Notes may not develop, which could limit the market price of the Notes. Moreover, the Notes are not expected to be rated, which may subject them to greater volatility than rated notes and particularly, greater than similar securities with an investment grade rating.**

Although we have listed the Notes on the NYSE under the symbol SCQ, we cannot provide any assurances that an active trading market will develop or be maintained for the Notes. The Notes are not rated which would impact their trading and subject them to greater price volatility. To the extent they are rated and received a non-investment grade rating, their price and trading activity could be negatively impacted. Moreover, if a rating agency assigns the Notes a non-investment grade rating, the Notes may be subject to greater price volatility than securities of similar maturity without such a non-investment grade rating. Certain of the underwriters have advised us that they intend to make a market in the Notes, but they are not obligated to do so. The underwriters may discontinue any market-making in the Notes at any time at their sole discretion. Accordingly, we cannot assure you that a liquid trading market will develop for the Notes, that you will be able to sell your Notes at a particular time or that the price you receive when you sell will be favorable. To the extent an active trading market does not develop, the liquidity and trading price for the Notes may be harmed. Accordingly, you may be required to bear the financial risk of an investment in the Notes for an indefinite period of time.

**We may choose to redeem the Notes when prevailing interest rates are relatively low.**

We may choose to redeem the Notes from time to time, especially when prevailing interest rates are lower than the rate borne by the Notes. If prevailing rates are lower at the time of redemption, holders of the Notes may not be able to reinvest the redemption proceeds in a comparable security at an effective interest rate as high as the interest rate on the Notes being redeemed. Our redemption right also may adversely impact a Noteholder's ability to sell the Notes as the optional redemption date or period approaches.

**If we default on our obligations to pay our other indebtedness, we may not be able to make payments on the Notes.**

As of December 31, 2016, we had approximately \$116 million of indebtedness outstanding under the Credit Facility. Any default under the agreements governing our indebtedness, including a default under the Credit Facility or other indebtedness to which we may be a party that is not waived by the required lenders, and the remedies sought by the holders of such indebtedness could make us unable to pay principal, premium, if any, and interest on the Notes and substantially decrease the market value of the Notes. If we are unable to generate sufficient cash flow and are otherwise unable to obtain funds necessary to meet required payments of principal, premium, if any, and interest on our indebtedness, or if we otherwise fail to comply with the various covenants, including financial and operating covenants, in the instruments governing our indebtedness (including the Credit Facility), we could be in default under the terms of the agreements governing such indebtedness. In the event of such default, the holders of such indebtedness could elect to declare all the funds borrowed thereunder to be due and payable, together with accrued and unpaid interest, the lenders under the Credit Facility or other debt we may incur in the future could elect to terminate their commitments, cease making further loans and institute foreclosure proceedings against our assets, and we could be forced into bankruptcy or liquidation. Our ability to generate sufficient cash flow in the future is, to some extent, subject to general economic, financial, competitive, legislative and regulatory factors as well as other factors that are beyond our control. We cannot assure you that our business will generate cash flow from operations, or that future borrowings will be available to us under the Credit Facility or otherwise, in an amount sufficient to enable us to

An active trading market for the Notes may not develop, which could limit the market price of the Notes. Moreover, t

meet our payment obligations under the Notes and our other debt and to fund other liquidity needs.

If our operating performance declines and we are not able to generate sufficient cash flow to service our debt obligations, we may in the future need to refinance or restructure our debt, including any Notes sold, sell assets, reduce or delay capital investments, seek to raise additional capital or seek to obtain waivers from the required lenders under the Credit Facility or other debt that we may incur in the future to avoid being in default. If we are unable to implement one or more of these alternatives, we may not be able to meet our payment obligations under the Notes and our other debt. If we breach our covenants under the Credit Facility or other debt and seek a waiver, we may not be able to obtain a waiver from the required lenders. If this occurs, we would be in default under the Credit Facility or other debt, the lenders could exercise their rights

TABLE OF CONTENTS

as described above, and we could be forced into bankruptcy or liquidation. If we are unable to repay debt, lenders having secured obligations could proceed against the collateral securing the debt. Because the Credit Facility has, and any future credit facilities will likely have, customary cross-default provisions, if the indebtedness under the Notes, the Credit Facility or under any future credit facility is accelerated, we may be unable to repay or finance the amounts due.

## **Item 1B. Unresolved Staff Comments**

Not applicable.

## **Item 2. Properties**

We do not own any real estate or other physical properties materially important to our operation. Our headquarters are located at 4400 Post Oak Parkway, Suite 2200, Houston, Texas. We also maintain offices in Charlotte, North Carolina and in the Washington, D.C. area. All locations are provided to us by Stellus Capital Management pursuant to the administration agreement. We believe that our office facilities are suitable and adequate for our business as we contemplate conducting it.

## **Item 3. Legal Proceedings**

We and Stellus Capital Management are not currently subject to any material legal proceedings, nor, to our knowledge, is any material legal proceeding threatened against us. From time to time, we may be a party to certain legal proceedings in the ordinary course of business, including proceedings relating to the enforcement of our rights under contracts with our portfolio companies. While the outcome of these legal proceedings cannot be predicted with certainty, we do not expect that these proceedings will have a material effect upon our financial condition or results of operations.

## **Item 4. Mine Safety Disclosures**

Not applicable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS**PART II**

Item 5. Market for Registrant's Common Equity, Related Stockholder Matters and Issuer Purchases of Equity Securities

**Price Range of Common Stock**

Our common stock is traded on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol SCM. The following table sets forth the range of high and low sales prices of our common stock as reported on the New York Stock Exchange.

	Price Range	
	High	Low
<b>Fiscal 2015</b>		
First quarter (from January 1, 2015 through March 31, 2015)	\$ 12.68	\$ 11.80
Second quarter (from April 1, 2015 through June 30, 2015)	\$ 12.58	\$ 11.36
Third quarter (from July 1, 2015 through September 30, 2015)	\$ 11.84	\$ 9.87
Fourth quarter (from October 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015)	\$ 10.93	\$ 9.53
<b>Fiscal 2016</b>		
First quarter (from January 1, 2016 to March 31, 2016)	\$ 10.22	\$ 7.85
Second quarter (from April 1, 2016 through June 30, 2016)	\$ 10.59	\$ 9.82
Third quarter (from July 1, 2016 through September 30, 2016)	\$ 11.54	\$ 10.35
Fourth quarter (from October 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016)	\$ 12.33	\$ 10.35
<b>Fiscal 2017</b>		
First quarter (from January 1, 2017 to March 7, 2017)	\$ 12.09	\$ 14.23

The last reported sale price for our common stock on the New York Stock Exchange on March 7, 2017 was \$13.90 per share. As of March 7, 2017, we had 10 shareholders of record.

Shares of BDCs may trade at a market price that is less than the value of the net assets attributable to those shares. The possibility that our shares of common stock will trade at a discount from net asset value per share or at premiums that are unsustainable over the long term are separate and distinct from the risk that our net asset value per share will decrease. It is not possible to predict whether the common stock will trade at, above, or below net asset value per share.

**Dividends**

Our dividends, if any, are determined by our board of directors. We have elected to be treated for federal income tax purposes as a RIC under Subchapter M of the Code. As a RIC, we will not be taxed on our investment company taxable income or realized net capital gains, to the extent that such taxable income or gains are distributed, or deemed to be distributed, to stockholders on a timely basis.

To maintain our qualification for RIC tax treatment, we must, among other things, distribute at least 90% of our net ordinary income and realized net short-term capital gains in excess of realized net long-term capital losses, if any. Depending on the level of taxable income earned in a tax year, we may choose to carry forward taxable income in excess of current year distributions into the next tax year and pay a 4% excise tax on such income. Any such carryover taxable income must be distributed through a dividend declared prior to filing the final tax return related to the year which generated such taxable income to avoid paying U.S. federal corporate income tax on the carryover amount. We

may, in the future, make actual distributions to our stockholders of our net capital gains. We can offer no assurance that we will achieve results that will permit the payment of any cash distributions and, if we issue senior securities, we may be prohibited from making distributions if doing so causes us to fail to maintain the asset coverage ratios stipulated by the 1940 Act or if distributions are limited by the terms of any of our borrowings.

We have adopted an opt out dividend reinvestment plan ( DRIP ) for our common stockholders. As a result, if we make cash distributions, then stockholders cash distributions will be automatically reinvested in additional shares of our common stock, unless they specifically opt out of the dividend reinvestment plan so as to receive cash distributions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The following table reflects the distributions per share that our board of directors has declared on our common stock since January 2013, none of which are expected to include return of capital:

Date Declared	Record Date	Payment Date	Per Share
March 7, 2013	March 21, 2013	March 28, 2013	\$ 0.3400
June 7, 2013	June 21, 2013	June 28, 2013	\$ 0.3400
August 21, 2013	September 5, 2013	September 27, 2013	\$ 0.3400
November 22, 2013	December 9, 2013	December 23, 2013	\$ 0.3400
December 27, 2013	January 15, 2014	January 24, 2014	\$ 0.0650
January 20, 2014	January 31, 2014	February 14, 2014	\$ 0.1133
January 20, 2014	February 28, 2014	March 14, 2014	\$ 0.1133
January 20, 2014	March 31, 2014	April 15, 2014	\$ 0.1133
April 17, 2014	April 30, 2014	May 15, 2014	\$ 0.1133
April 17, 2014	May 30, 2014	June 16, 2014	\$ 0.1133
April 17, 2014	June 30, 2014	July 15, 2014	\$ 0.1133
July 7, 2014	July 31, 2014	August 15, 2014	\$ 0.1133
July 7, 2014	August 29, 2014	September 15, 2014	\$ 0.1133
July 7, 2014	September 30, 2014	October 15, 2014	\$ 0.1133
October 15, 2014	October 31, 2014	November 14, 2014	\$ 0.1133
October 15, 2014	November 28, 2014	December 15, 2014	\$ 0.1133
October 15, 2014	December 31, 2014	January 15, 2015	\$ 0.1133
January 22, 2015	February 2, 2015	February 13, 2015	\$ 0.1133
January 22, 2015	February 27, 2015	March 13, 2015	\$ 0.1133
January 22, 2015	March 31, 2015	April 15, 2015	\$ 0.1133
April 15, 2015	April 30, 2015	May 15, 2015	\$ 0.1133
April 15, 2015	May 29, 2015	June 15, 2015	\$ 0.1133
April 15, 2015	June 30, 2015	July 15, 2015	\$ 0.1133
July 8, 2015	July 31, 2015	August 14, 2015	\$ 0.1133
July 8, 2015	August 31, 2015	September 15, 2015	\$ 0.1133
July 8, 2015	September 20, 2015	October 15, 2015	\$ 0.1133
October 14, 2015	October 30, 2015	November 13, 2015	\$ 0.1133
October 14, 2015	November 30, 2015	December 15, 2015	\$ 0.1133
October 14, 2015	December 31, 2015	January 15, 2016	\$ 0.1133
January 13, 2016	January 29, 2016	February 15, 2016	\$ 0.1133
January 13, 2016	February 29, 2016	March 15, 2016	\$ 0.1133
January 13, 2016	March 31, 2016	April 15, 2016	\$ 0.1133
April 15, 2016	April 29, 2016	May 13, 2016	\$ 0.1133
April 15, 2016	May 31, 2016	June 15, 2016	\$ 0.1133
April 15, 2016	June 30, 2016	July 15, 2016	\$ 0.1133
July 7, 2016	July 29, 2016	August 15, 2016	\$ 0.1133
July 7, 2016	August 31, 2016	September 15, 2016	\$ 0.1133
July 7, 2016	September 30, 2016	October 14, 2016	\$ 0.1133
October 7, 2016	October 31, 2016	November 15, 2016	\$ 0.1133
October 7, 2016	November 30, 2016	December 15, 2016	\$ 0.1133
October 7, 2016	December 30, 2016	January 13, 2017	\$ 0.1133
			\$ 5.5038





TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Recent Sales of Unregistered Securities**

None.

**Use of Proceeds from Recent Sales of Registered Securities**

None.

**Purchases of Equity Securities**

None.

**Stock Performance Graph**

This graph compares the return on our common stock with that of the Standard & Poor's 500 Stock Index, the Russell 2000 Financial Services Index, and the Raymond James BDC Index, for the period from inception through March 1, 2017. The graph assumes that, at inception, a person invested \$100 in each of our common stock, the S&P 500 Index, the Russell 2000 Financial Services Index, and the Raymond James BDC Index. The graph measures total stockholder return, which takes into account both changes in stock price and dividends. It assumes that dividends paid are invested in like securities.

The graph and other information furnished under this Part II Item 5 of this Form 10-K shall not be deemed to be soliciting material or to be filed with the SEC or subject to Regulation 14A or 14C, or to the liabilities of Section 18 of the 1934 Act. The stock price performance included in the above graph is not necessarily indicative of future stock price performance.

**Item 6. Selected Financial Data**

The following selected financial data for the years ended December 31, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013 and the period from Inception (May 18, 2012) through December 31, 2012, set forth below was derived from our financial statements which have been audited by Grant Thornton LLP, our independent registered public accounting firm. The data should be read in conjunction with our financial statements and related notes thereto and Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations included elsewhere in this report.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The data should be read in conjunction with our financial statements and related notes thereto and Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations included elsewhere in this report.

	For the year ended December 31, 2016	For the year ended December 31, 2015	For the year ended December 31, 2014	For the year ended December 31, 2013	For the period from Inception (May 18, 2012) through December 31, 2012
<b>Statement of Operations Data:</b>					
Total investment income	\$39,490,197	\$35,158,559	\$32,324,847	\$29,400,736	\$3,696,432
Total expenses, net of fee waiver	\$22,177,996	\$18,611,431	\$15,812,750	\$13,389,007	\$15,812,750
Net investment income	\$17,312,201	\$16,547,128	\$16,512,097	\$16,011,729	\$2,392,076
Net increase in net assets resulting from operations	\$23,199,062	\$7,670,536	\$10,179,142	\$17,544,997	\$1,298,424
<b>Per Share Data:</b>					
Net asset value	\$13.69	\$13.19	\$13.94	\$14.54	\$14.45
Net investment income	\$1.39	\$1.33	\$1.34	\$1.33	\$0.11
Net increase in net assets resulting from operations	\$1.86	\$0.61	\$0.83	\$1.45	\$0.11
Distributions declared	\$1.36	\$1.36	\$1.43	\$1.43	\$0.18
<b>Balance Sheet Data:</b>	At December 31, 2016	At December 31, 2015	At December 31, 2014	At December 31, 2013	At December 31, 2012
Investments at fair value	\$365,625,891	\$349,017,697	\$315,965,434	\$277,504,510	\$195,451,256
Cash and cash equivalents	\$9,194,129	\$10,875,790	\$2,046,563	\$13,663,542	\$62,131,686
Total assets <sup>(2)</sup>	\$379,878,729	\$365,368,412	\$323,776,402	\$296,541,900	\$260,595,157
Total liabilities <sup>(2)</sup>	\$208,996,944	\$200,717,308	\$149,826,950	\$120,650,386	\$86,749,202
Total net assets	\$170,881,785	\$164,651,104	\$173,949,452	\$175,891,514	\$173,845,955
<b>Other Data:</b>					
Number of portfolio companies at period end	45	39	32	26	15
Weighted average yield on debt investments at period end <sup>(1)</sup>	11.0 %	10.6 %	10.9 %	11.4 %	12.5 %

(1) Computed using the effective interest rates for all of our debt investments, including accretion of original issue discount.

ASU No. 2015-03 Simplifying the Presentation of Debt Issuance Costs was effective for the quarter ended March (2)31, 2016. Total assets and total liabilities for the periods prior to the effective date have been modified from their respective filings to conform to this presentation.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Item 7. Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations

**Forward-Looking Statements**

Some of the statements in this annual report on Form 10-K constitute forward-looking statements, which relate to future events or our future performance or financial condition. The forward-looking statements contained in this annual report on Form 10-K involve risks and uncertainties, including statements as to:

our future operating results;  
our business prospects and the prospects of our portfolio companies;  
the effect of investments that we expect to make;  
our contractual arrangements and relationships with third parties;  
actual and potential conflicts of interest with Stellus Capital Management;  
the dependence of our future success on the general economy and its effect on the industries in which we invest;  
the ability of our portfolio companies to achieve their objectives;  
the use of borrowed money to finance a portion of our investments;  
the adequacy of our financing sources and working capital;  
the timing of cash flows, if any, from the operations of our portfolio companies;  
the ability of Stellus Capital Management to locate suitable investments for us and to monitor and administer our investments;  
the ability of Stellus Capital Management to attract and retain highly talented professionals;  
our ability to maintain our qualification as a RIC and as a BDC; and  
the effect of future changes in laws or regulations (including the interpretation of these laws and regulations by regulatory authorities) and conditions in our operating areas, particularly with respect to business development companies or RICs.

Such forward-looking statements may include statements preceded by, followed by or that otherwise include the words may, might, will, intend, should, could, can, would, expect, believe, estimate, anticipate or similar words.

We have based the forward-looking statements included in this annual report on Form 10-K on information available to us on the date of this annual report on Form 10-K. Actual results could differ materially from those anticipated in our forward-looking statements, and future results could differ materially from historical performance. We undertake no obligation to revise or update any forward-looking statements, whether as a result of new information, future events or otherwise, unless required by law or SEC rule or regulation. You are advised to consult any additional disclosures that we may make directly to you or through reports that we in the future may file with the SEC, including annual reports on Form 10-K, quarterly reports on Form 10-Q and current reports on Form 8-K.

**Overview**

We were organized as a Maryland corporation on May 18, 2012 and formally commenced operations on November 7, 2012. Our investment objective is to maximize the total return to our stockholders in the form of current income and capital appreciation through debt and related equity investments in middle-market companies.

We are an externally managed, non-diversified, closed-end investment company that has elected to be regulated as a BDC under the 1940 Act. As a BDC, we are required to comply with certain regulatory requirements.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

For instance, as a BDC, we may not acquire any assets other than qualifying assets specified in the 1940 Act unless, at the time the acquisition is made, at least 70% of our total assets are qualifying assets. Qualifying assets include investments in eligible portfolio companies. Under the relevant SEC rules, the term eligible portfolio company includes all private operating companies, operating companies whose securities are not listed on a national securities exchange, and certain public operating companies that have listed their securities on a national securities exchange and have a market capitalization of less than \$250 million, in each case organized and with their principal of business in the United States.

We have elected to be treated for tax purposes as a RIC under Subchapter M of the Code. To maintain our qualification as a RIC, we must, among other things, meet certain source-of-income and asset diversification requirements. As of December 31, 2016, we were in compliance with the RIC requirements. As a RIC, we generally will not have to pay corporate-level taxes on any income we distribute to our stockholders.

## Portfolio Composition and Investment Activity

### Portfolio Composition

We originate and invest primarily in privately-held middle-market companies (typically those with \$5.0 million to \$50.0 million of EBITDA) through first lien, second lien, unitranche and mezzanine debt financing, often times with a corresponding equity investment.

As of December 31, 2016, we had \$365.6 million (at fair value) invested in 45 companies. As of December 31, 2016, our portfolio included approximately 31% of first lien debt, 45% of second lien debt, 19% of mezzanine debt and 5% of equity investments at fair value. The composition of our investments at cost and fair value as of December 31, 2016 was as follows:

	Cost	Fair Value
Senior Secured First Lien	\$ 113,264,200	\$ 113,482,205
Senior Secured Second Lien	163,112,172	162,486,388
Unsecured Debt	70,919,986	70,725,412
Equity	14,920,893	18,931,886
Total Investments	\$ 362,217,251	\$ 365,625,891

As of December 31, 2015, we had \$349.0 million (at fair value) invested in 39 companies. As of December 31, 2015, our portfolio included approximately 38% of first lien debt, 38% of second lien debt, 20% of mezzanine debt and 4% of equity investments at fair value. The composition of our investments at cost and fair value as of December 31, 2015 was as follows:

	Cost	Fair Value
Senior Secured First Lien	\$ 133,344,891	\$ 131,908,961
Senior Secured Second Lien	136,853,644	131,972,581
Unsecured Debt	81,492,139	72,212,282
Equity	12,521,785	12,923,873
Total Investments	\$ 364,212,459	\$ 349,017,697



TABLE OF CONTENTS

The following is a summary of geographical concentration of our investment portfolio as of December 31, 2016:

	Cost	Fair Value	% of Total Investments	
Texas	\$ 74,433,626	\$ 73,576,277	20.13	%
New York	36,651,725	36,479,999	9.98	%
Colorado	27,855,053	28,979,651	7.93	%
California	28,298,845	28,606,727	7.82	%
Massachusetts	22,467,254	22,944,663	6.28	%
Georgia	20,626,735	22,469,217	6.15	%
New Jersey	20,710,728	20,804,704	5.69	%
Illinois	17,554,821	17,590,281	4.81	%
Alabama	16,191,841	16,584,379	4.54	%
Missouri	14,096,725	14,441,599	3.95	%
Tennessee	12,310,883	12,045,701	3.29	%
Arkansas	9,912,815	10,102,283	2.76	%
Pennsylvania	8,035,182	8,301,104	2.27	%
Puerto Rico	8,712,537	8,229,054	2.25	%
Florida	7,453,847	7,431,820	2.03	%
Canada	6,765,448	6,692,648	1.83	%
Minnesota	6,362,834	6,374,800	1.74	%
New York	5,450,667	5,450,667	1.49	%
North Carolina	4,920,321	5,000,000	1.37	%
Washington	4,158,696	4,211,990	1.15	%
Virginia	4,029,530	4,060,519	1.11	%
Arizona	3,408,099	3,410,583	0.93	%
Utah	1,291,083	1,311,789	0.36	%
Ohio	517,956	525,436	0.14	%
	\$ 362,217,251	\$ 365,625,891	100.00	%

The following is a summary of geographical concentration of our investment portfolio as of December 31, 2015:

	Cost	Fair Value	% of Total Investments	
New York	\$ 53,089,906	\$ 44,028,592	12.62	%
Texas	44,455,960	42,224,563	12.10	%
Colorado	27,775,081	28,719,072	8.23	%
California	28,079,435	27,836,262	7.97	%
Georgia	26,100,285	25,845,891	7.41	%
Massachusetts	22,407,217	21,363,609	6.12	%
New Jersey	21,285,356	20,943,875	6.00	%
Alabama	18,330,990	18,153,182	5.20	%
Illinois	17,514,510	17,452,318	5.00	%
Missouri	14,067,329	13,369,069	3.83	%
Tennessee	12,286,222	12,051,362	3.45	%
Ohio	10,593,407	10,593,407	3.04	%
Pennsylvania	9,827,328	9,827,328	2.82	%



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Puerto Rico	8,702,074	8,602,868	2.46	%
Canada	9,411,185	8,300,280	2.38	%
Florida	7,592,824	7,390,241	2.12	%
Minnesota	6,881,287	6,839,308	1.96	%
North Carolina	4,909,192	4,760,844	1.36	%
Indiana	4,739,046	4,715,703	1.35	%
Kentucky	4,473,006	4,518,888	1.29	%
Washington	4,146,167	4,083,966	1.17	%
Virginia	4,016,918	3,962,905	1.14	%
Arizona	3,527,734	3,434,164	0.98	%
	\$ 364,212,459	\$ 349,017,697	100.00	%

64

---

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The following is a summary of industry concentration of our investment portfolio as of December 31, 2016:

	Cost	Fair Value	% of Total Investments	
Finance	\$ 56,663,586	\$ 57,504,930	15.73	%
Software	36,199,915	36,730,618	10.05	%
Media: Broadcasting & Subscription	36,001,876	36,637,803	10.02	%
Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals	35,002,051	35,583,505	9.73	%
Services: Business	24,105,217	25,884,879	7.08	%
Chemicals, Plastics, & Rubber	20,763,612	21,165,542	5.79	%
Consumer Goods: Durable	18,957,486	19,146,954	5.24	%
Retail	18,973,041	19,095,787	5.22	%
Education	17,325,046	17,498,701	4.79	%
Telecommunications	16,403,791	16,009,390	4.38	%
High Tech Industries	16,486,738	15,382,000	4.21	%
Consumer goods: non-durable	12,437,795	12,700,000	3.47	%
Beverage, Food, & Tobacco	11,881,630	11,991,250	3.28	%
Automotive	8,035,182	8,301,104	2.27	%
Services: Consumer	8,453,847	8,153,879	2.23	%
Transportation: Cargo	6,765,448	6,692,648	1.83	%
Energy: Oil & Gas	7,320,058	6,654,662	1.82	%
Services: Government	4,029,530	4,060,519	1.11	%
Hotel, Gaming, & Leisure	3,408,099	3,410,583	0.93	%
Construction & Building	2,485,347	2,495,701	0.68	%
Environmental Industries	517,956	525,436	0.14	%
	\$ 362,217,251	\$ 365,625,891	100.00	%

The following is a summary of industry concentration of our investment portfolio as of December 31, 2015:

	Cost	Fair Value	% of Total Investments	
Finance	\$ 56,453,642	\$ 56,020,910	16.05	%
Services: Business	37,386,875	36,831,622	10.56	%
Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals	35,457,015	36,161,248	10.36	%
Retail	31,669,891	31,390,951	8.99	%
Media: Broadcasting & Subscription	30,987,416	30,220,742	8.66	%
Software	26,553,384	25,447,575	7.29	%
Services: Consumer	25,265,858	16,531,754	4.74	%
Telecommunications	16,369,463	14,347,366	4.11	%
Chemicals, Plastics, & Rubber	13,912,209	13,695,631	3.92	%
Consumer goods: non-durable	12,430,852	12,430,852	3.56	%
Education	12,383,339	12,081,063	3.46	%
Environmental Industries	10,593,407	10,593,407	3.04	%
Automotive	9,827,328	9,827,328	2.82	%
Beverage, Food, & Tobacco	7,901,427	8,000,000	2.29	%
Transportation & Logistics	7,403,404	7,355,239	2.11	%
High Tech Industries	6,644,181	6,581,989	1.89	%

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Transportation: Cargo	6,746,827	5,660,744	1.62	%
Metals & Mining	4,473,006	4,518,888	1.29	%
Services: Government	4,016,918	3,962,905	1.14	%
Hotel, Gaming, & Leisure	3,527,734	3,434,164	0.98	%
Construction & Building	2,481,388	2,455,931	0.70	%
Energy: Oil & Gas	1,726,895	1,467,388	0.42	%
	\$ 364,212,459	\$ 349,017,697	100.00	%

65

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

At December 31, 2016, our average portfolio company investment at amortized cost and fair value was approximately \$8.0 million and \$8.1 million, respectively, and our largest portfolio company investment by amortized cost and fair value was approximately \$22.5 million and \$22.9 million, respectively. At December 31, 2015, our average portfolio company investment at amortized cost and fair value was approximately \$9.3 million and \$8.9 million, respectively, and our largest portfolio company investment by amortized cost and fair value was approximately \$22.4 million and \$21.4 million, respectively.

At December 31, 2016, 77% of our debt investments bore interest based on floating rates (subject to interest rate floors), such as LIBOR, and 23% bore interest at fixed rates. At December 31, 2015, 75% of our debt investments bore interest based on floating rates (subject to interest rate floors), such as LIBOR, and 25% bore interest at fixed rates.

The weighted average yield on all of our debt investments as of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015 was approximately 11.0% and 10.6%, respectively. The weighted average yield was computed using the effective interest rates for all of our debt investments, including accretion of original issue discount.

As of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, we had cash and cash equivalents of \$9.2 million and \$10.9 million, respectively.

## **Investment Activity**

During the year ended December 31, 2016, we made \$65.7 million of investments at cost in 10 new portfolio companies and five to existing portfolio companies. During the year ended December 31, 2016, we received \$55.9 million in proceeds principally from prepayments of our investments, including \$9.9 million from amortization of certain other investments.

During the year ended December 31, 2015, we made \$133.7 million of investments at cost in 14 new portfolio companies and seven to existing portfolio companies. During the year ended December 31, 2015, we received \$93.3 million in proceeds principally from prepayments of our investments, including \$5.6 million from amortization of certain other investments. Excluded from the numbers above is a non-cash transaction of \$4.2 million related to the repayment and reinvestment in a new term loan of an existing portfolio company.

Our level of investment activity can vary substantially from period to period depending on many factors, including the amount of debt and equity capital to middle market companies, the level of merger and acquisition activity, the general economic environment and the competitive environment for the types of investments we make.

## **Asset Quality**

In addition to various risk management and monitoring tools, Stellus Capital Management uses an investment rating system to characterize and monitor the credit profile and expected level of returns on each investment in our portfolio.

This investment rating system uses a five-level numeric scale. The following is a description of the conditions associated with each investment category:

Investment Category 1 is used for investments that are performing above expectations, and whose risks remain favorable compared to the expected risk at the time of the original investment.

Investment Category 2 is used for investments that are performing within expectations and whose risks remain neutral compared to the expected risk at the time of the original investment. All new loans are initially rated 2.

Investment Category 3 is used for investments that are performing below expectations and that require closer monitoring, but where no loss of return or principal is expected. Portfolio companies with a rating of 3 may be out of compliance with financial covenants.

Investment Category 4 is used for investments that are performing substantially below expectations and whose risks have increased substantially since the original investment. These investments are often in work out. Investments with a rating of 4 are those for which some loss of return but no loss of principal is expected.

66

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Investment Category 5 is used for investments that are performing substantially below expectations and whose risks have increased substantially since the original investment. These investments are almost always in work out. Investments with a rating of 5 are those for which some loss of return and principal is expected.

Investment Category	As of December 31, 2016			As of December 31, 2015		
	Fair Value (in millions)	% of Total Portfolio	Number of Portfolio Companies	Fair Value (in millions)	% of Total Portfolio	Number of Portfolio Companies
1	\$ 73.5	20 %	6	\$ 36.1	10 %	3
2	239.8	66 %	32	292.4	84 %	32
3	50.7	14 %	5	15.8	5 %	3
4	0.9	%	1		%	
5	0.7	%	1	5	1 %	1
Total	\$ 365.6	100 %	45	\$ 349.0	100 %	39

## Loans and Debt Securities on Non-Accrual Status

We will not accrue interest on loans and debt securities if we have reason to doubt our ability to collect such interest.

As of December 31, 2016, we had two loans on non-accrual status, which represents approximately 0.7% of the portfolio at cost and 0.4% at fair value. As of December 31, 2015, we had one loan on non-accrual status, which represented approximately 3.6% of the portfolio at cost and 1.3% at fair value.

## Results of Operations

An important measure of our financial performance is net increase (decrease) in net assets resulting from operations, which includes net investment income (loss), net realized gain (loss) and net unrealized appreciation (depreciation). Net investment income (loss) is the difference between our income from interest, dividends, fees and other investment income and our operating expenses including interest on borrowed funds. Net realized gain (loss) on investments is the difference between the proceeds received from dispositions of portfolio investments and their amortized cost. Net unrealized appreciation (depreciation) on investments is the net change in the fair value of our investment portfolio.

## Comparison of the Years ended December 31, 2016, 2015, and 2014

### Revenues

We generate revenue in the form of interest income on debt investments and capital gains and distributions, if any, on investment securities that we may acquire in portfolio companies. Our debt investments typically have a term of five to seven years and bear interest at a fixed or floating rate. Interest on our debt securities is generally payable quarterly. Payments of principal on our debt investments may be amortized over the stated term of the investment, deferred for several years or due entirely at maturity. In some cases, our debt investments may pay interest in-kind, or PIK. Any outstanding principal amount of our debt securities and any accrued but unpaid interest will generally become due at the maturity date. The level of interest income we receive is directly related to the balance of interest-bearing investments multiplied by the weighted average yield of our investments. We expect that the total dollar amount of interest and any dividend income that we earn to increase as the size of our investment portfolio increases. In addition, we may generate revenue in the form of prepayment fees, commitment, loan origination, structuring or due diligence

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fees, fees for providing significant managerial assistance and consulting fees.

67

---

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The following shows the breakdown of investment income for the years ended December 31, 2016, 2015, and 2014 (in millions).

	Year ended December 31, 2016	Year ended December 31, 2015	Year ended December 31, 2014
Interest Income	\$ 38.0	\$ 34.3	\$ 30.9
PIK Income	0.2	0.4	0.7
Miscellaneous fees	1.3	0.5	0.7
Total	\$ 39.5	\$ 35.2	\$ 32.3

The increase in interest income from the respective periods were due to growth in the overall investment portfolio.

**Expenses**

Our primary operating expenses include the payment of fees to Stellus Capital Management under the investment advisory agreement, our allocable portion of overhead expenses under the administration agreement and other operating costs described below. We bear all other out-of-pocket costs and expenses of our operations and transactions, which may include:

- the cost of calculating our net asset value, including the cost of any third-party valuation services;
- the cost of effecting sales and repurchases of shares of our common stock and other securities;
- fees payable to third parties relating to making investments, including out-of-pocket fees and expenses (such as travel expenses) associated with performing due diligence and reviews of prospective investments;
- transfer agent and custodial fees;
- out-of-pocket fees and expenses associated with marketing efforts;
- federal and state registration fees and any stock exchange listing fees;
- U.S. federal, state and local taxes;
- independent directors' fees and expenses;
- brokerage commissions;
- fidelity bond, directors' and officers' liability insurance and other insurance premiums;
- direct costs, such as printing, mailing, long distance telephone and staff;
- fees and expenses associated with independent audits and outside legal costs;
- costs associated with our reporting and compliance obligations under the 1940 Act and other applicable U.S. federal and state securities laws; and
- other expenses incurred by Stellus Capital Management or us in connection with administering our business, including payments under the administration agreement that are based upon our allocable portion of overhead (subject to the review of our board of directors).



TABLE OF CONTENTS

The following shows the breakdown of operating expenses for the years ended December 31, 2016, 2015 and 2014 (in millions).

	Year ended December 31, 2016	Year ended December 31, 2015	Year ended December 31, 2014
<b>Operating Expenses</b>			
Management Fees	\$ 6.3	\$ 5.8	\$ 5.2
Valuation Fees	0.4	0.4	0.4
Administrative services expenses	1.0	1.0	1.2
Incentive fees <sup>(a)</sup>	4.3	4.0	3.1
Professional fees	0.7	0.6	0.7
Directors' fees	0.3	0.3	0.4
Insurance expense	0.5	0.5	0.5
Interest expense and other fees	8.0	6.2	5.3
Deferred Offering Costs	0.3		
Other general and administrative	0.4	0.4	0.4
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 22.2</b>	<b>\$ 19.2</b>	<b>\$ 17.2</b>
Waiver of Incentive Fees		(0.6 )	(1.4 )
<b>Total Expenses, net of fee waivers</b>	<b>\$ 22.2</b>	<b>\$ 18.6</b>	<b>\$ 15.8</b>

<sup>(a)</sup> For the years ended December 31, 2016, 2015 and 2014, incentive fees include the effect of the Capital Gains Incentive Fee of \$0, \$0 million and (\$0.3) million, respectively.

The increase in operating expenses for the respective periods was due to: 1) an increase in interest and fees on our SBA-guaranteed debentures, which were fully drawn in the fourth quarter of 2015 and pooled in the first quarter of 2016, and 6.50% notes (the Notes), which were issued in May 2014. 2) an increase in management and incentive fees, attributable to our growing portfolio and 3) deferred offering costs, which were fully expensed in the second quarter of 2016. Additional operating expense for the year ended December 31, 2014 includes (\$0.3) million related to our Capital Gains Incentive Fee.

While under no obligation to do so, the Advisor waived incentive fees of \$646,333 and \$1,399,226 for the years ended December 31, 2015 and December 31, 2014 to the extent required to support an annualized dividend yield of 9.0% based on the price per share of our common stock in connection with the Offering. Such waiver in no way implies that the Advisor will waive incentive fees in any future period. The Advisor did not waive incentive fees during the year ended December 31, 2016.

## Net Investment Income

Net investment income was \$17.3 million, or \$1.39 per common share based on 12,479,959 weighted-average common shares outstanding at December 31, 2016. Net investment income was \$16.5 million, or \$1.33 per common share based on 12,479,961 weighted-average common shares outstanding at December 31, 2015. Net investment income was \$16.5 million, or \$1.34 per common share based on 12,281,178 weighted-average common shares outstanding at December 31, 2014.

Net investment income for the year ended December 31, 2016 increased compared to the year ended December 31, 2015 as a result of our growing portfolio, which was partially offset by the increase in interest and fees on our

SBA-guaranteed debentures and the Notes.

## **Net Realized Gains and Losses**

We measure realized gains or losses by the difference between the net proceeds from the repayment, sale or other disposition and the amortized cost basis of the investment, using the specific identification method, without regard to unrealized appreciation or depreciation previously recognized.

69

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Proceeds from repayments of investments and amortization of other certain investments for the year ended December 31, 2016 totaled \$55.9 million and net realized loss totaled \$13.1 million, \$12.2 million of which is related to the realized loss of our term loan in Binder & Binder. Proceeds from the sales and repayments of investments and amortization of other certain investments for the year ended December 31, 2015 totaled \$93.3 million and net realized gains totaled \$0.4 million. Proceeds from the sales and repayments of investments and amortization of other certain investments for the year ended December 31, 2014 totaled \$54.9 million and net realized gains totaled \$0.5 million.

### **Net Change in Unrealized Appreciation of Investments**

Net change in unrealized appreciation primarily reflects the change in portfolio investment values during the reporting period, including the reversal of previously recorded appreciation or depreciation when gains or losses are realized.

Net change in unrealized appreciation (depreciation) on investments and cash equivalents for the year ended December 31, 2016, 2015 and 2014 totaled \$18.6 million, (\$9.2) million, and (\$6.5) million, respectively.

The change in unrealized appreciation in 2016 was due primarily to two factors: a) the reclassification of our one previously reported non-accrual investment from unrealized to realized accounted for \$8.3 million of this year's unrealized gain and b) \$10.3 million from tightening interest rate spreads in 2016. The change in unrealized depreciation in 2015 and 2014 was due primarily to unrealized depreciation on our one non-accrual investment as well as unrealized depreciation on other investments in the portfolio due to a widening of market interest rate spreads.

### **Provision for Taxes on Unrealized Appreciation on Investments**

We have direct wholly owned subsidiaries that have elected to be taxable entities (the Taxable Subsidiaries). The Taxable Subsidiaries permit us to hold equity investments in portfolio companies that are pass through entities for tax purposes and continue to comply with the source income requirements contained in RIC tax provisions of the Code. The Taxable Subsidiaries are not consolidated with us for income tax purposes and may generate income tax expense, benefit, and the related tax assets and liabilities, as a result of their ownership of certain portfolio investments. The income tax expense, or benefit, if any, and related tax assets and liabilities are reflected in our consolidated financial statements. For the year ended December 31, 2016, 2015 and 2014, we recognized a benefit (provision) for income tax at our Taxable Subsidiaries of \$0.4 million, \$(0.1) million and \$(0.3) million. As of December 31, 2016 and 2015, a deferred tax liability of \$8 thousand and \$0.4 million, respectively, were included on the Consolidated Statement of Assets and Liabilities.

### **Net Increase in Net Assets Resulting from Operations**

Net increase in net assets resulting from operations totaled \$23.2 million, or \$1.86 per common share based on weighted-average of 12,479,959 for the year ended December 31, 2016, as compared to \$7.7 million, or \$0.61 per common share based on weighted-average of 12,479,961 common shares outstanding for the year ended December 31, 2015, as compared to \$10.2 million, or \$0.83 per common share based on weighted-average of 12,281,178 common shares outstanding for the year ended December 31, 2014.

The increase in net increase in net assets resulting from operations was due primarily to an increase in unrealized appreciation from the tightening of interest rate spreads in 2016.

## **Financial condition, liquidity and capital resources**

### **Cash Flows from Operating and Financing Activities**

Our operating activities provided net cash of \$8.8 million for the year ended December 31, 2016, primarily in connection with the sale and repayment of portfolio investments, offset by the purchase and origination of portfolio investments. Our financing activities for the year ended December 31, 2016 used cash of \$10.5 million primarily from repayments on our Credit Facility.

70

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our operating activities used net cash of \$24.4 million for the year ended December 31, 2015, primarily in connection with the purchase and origination of portfolio investments. Our financing activities for the year ended December 31, 2015 provided cash of \$33.3 million primarily from the issuance of our SBA-guaranteed debentures.

Our operating activities used cash of \$27.2 million for the year ended December 31, 2014, primarily in connection with purchase and origination of portfolio investments. Our financing activities for the year ended December 31, 2014 provided cash of \$15.6 million primarily from the issuance of the Notes and our SBA-guaranteed debentures.

Our liquidity and capital resources are derived from the Credit Facility, the Notes, SBA-guaranteed debentures and cash flows from operations, including investment sales and repayments, and income earned. Our primary use of funds from operations includes investments in portfolio companies and other operating expenses we incur, as well as the payment of dividends to the holders of our common stock. We used, and expect to continue to use, these capital resources as well as proceeds from turnover within our portfolio and from public and private offerings of securities to finance our investment activities.

Although we expect to fund the growth of our investment portfolio through the net proceeds from future public and private equity offerings and issuances of senior securities or future borrowings to the extent permitted by the 1940 Act, our plans to raise capital may not be successful. In this regard, if our common stock trades at a price below our then-current net asset value per share, we may be limited in our ability to raise equity capital given that we cannot sell our common stock at a price below net asset value per share unless our stockholders approve such a sale and our board of directors makes certain determinations in connection therewith. In addition, we intend to distribute between 90% and 100% of our taxable income to our stockholders in order to satisfy the requirements applicable to RICs under Subchapter M of the Code. Consequently, we may not have the funds or the ability to fund new investments, to make additional investments in our portfolio companies, to fund our unfunded commitments to portfolio companies or to repay borrowings. In addition, the illiquidity of our portfolio investments may make it difficult for us to sell these investments when desired and, if we are required to sell these investments, we may realize significantly less than their recorded value.

Also, as a BDC, we generally are required to meet a coverage ratio of total assets, less liabilities and indebtedness not represented by senior securities, to total senior securities, which include all of our borrowings and any outstanding preferred stock, of at least 200%. We have received exemptive relief from the SEC to permit us to exclude the debt of our SBIC subsidiary guaranteed by the SBA from the definition of senior securities in the 200% asset coverage test under the 1940 Act. This requirement limits the amount that we may borrow. We were in compliance with the asset coverage ratios at all times. As of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, our asset coverage ratio was 221% and 222%, respectively. The amount of leverage that we employ will depend on our assessment of market conditions and other factors at the time of any proposed borrowing, such as the maturity, covenant package and rate structure of the proposed borrowings, our ability to raise funds through the issuance of shares of our common stock and the risks of such borrowings within the context of our investment outlook. Ultimately, we only intend to use leverage if the expected returns from borrowing to make investments will exceed the cost of such borrowing. As of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, we had cash and cash equivalents of \$9.2 million and \$10.9 million, respectively.

### **Credit Facility**

On November 7, 2012, the Company entered into a revolving credit facility (the Credit Facility ) with various lenders. SunTrust Bank, one of the lenders, serves as administrative agent under the Credit Facility. The Credit Facility, as amended on November 21, 2014 and August 31, 2016, provides for borrowings in an aggregate amount of \$120.0 million on a committed basis with an accordion feature that allows the Company to increase the aggregate

commitments up to \$195.0 million, subject to new or existing lenders agreeing to participate in the increase and other customary conditions. There can be no assurances that existing lenders will agree to such an increase, or that additional lenders will join the Credit Facility to increase available borrowings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Borrowings under the Credit Facility bear interest, subject to the Company's election, on a per annum basis equal to (i) LIBOR plus 2.625% with no LIBOR floor or (ii) 1.625% plus an alternate base rate based on the highest of the Prime Rate, Federal Funds Rate plus 0.5% or one month LIBOR plus 1.0%. The Company pays unused commitment fees of 0.50% per annum on the unused lender commitments under the Credit Facility. Interest is payable quarterly in arrears. Any amounts borrowed under the Credit Facility will mature, and all accrued and unpaid interest thereunder will be due and payable, on October 1, 2018.

The Company's obligations to the lenders are secured by a first priority security interest in its portfolio of securities and cash not held at the SBIC subsidiary, but excluding short term investments. The Credit Facility contains certain affirmative and negative covenants, including but not limited to: (i) maintaining a minimum liquidity test of at least 85% of adjusted borrowing base, (ii) maintaining an asset coverage ratio of at least 2.0 to 1.0, and (iii) maintaining a minimum shareholder's equity. As of December 31, 2016, the Company was in compliance with these covenants.

Additionally, the Credit Facility requires that the Company meet certain conditions in connection with incurring additional indebtedness under the Credit Facility, including that the Company have a minimum asset coverage ratio after giving effect to such borrowing. On August 31, 2016, the Credit Facility was amended to reduce asset coverage related to additional indebtedness from 2.25 to 2.20 to 1.0, as long as certain conditions are met. These conditions state that (i) the aggregate amount of PIK interest during the most recently ended fiscal quarter of the borrower does not exceed 2% of the aggregate amount of interest income that the borrower has received on all investments in the borrowing base during such fiscal quarter; (ii) the sum of the value of all non-accrual investments does not exceed 5% of the value of all investments in the borrowing base and (iii) the borrower maintains a minimum liquidity test of at least 80% of adjusted borrowing base. As of December 31, 2016, these conditions were met.

As of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, the outstanding balance under the Credit Facility was \$116.0 million and \$109.5 million, respectively. The carrying amount of the amount outstanding under the Credit Facility approximates its fair value. The Company incurred total costs of \$3.1 million in connection with obtaining, amending, and maintaining the Credit Facility, which are being amortized over the life of the Credit Facility. As of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, \$0.8 million and \$1.3 million of such prepaid loan structure fees and administration fees had yet to be amortized, respectively. These prepaid loan fees are presented on our consolidated statement of assets and liabilities as a deduction from the debt liability attributable to the Credit Facility as required by ASU No. 2015-3. See Note 1 to our Consolidated Financial Statements for further discussion.

For the year ended December 31, 2016, the weighted average effective interest rate under the Credit Facility was approximately 3.2% (approximately 3.7% including commitment fees and other loan fees). Interest is paid quarterly in arrears. The Company recorded interest and fee expense on the Credit Facility of \$4.0 million for the year ended December 31, 2016, of which \$3.4 million was interest expense, \$0.5 million was amortization of loan fees paid on the Credit Facility, and the remainder related to commitment fees on the unused portion of the Credit Facility and loan administration fees. The Company paid \$3.4 million in interest expense and unused commitment fees for the year ended December 31, 2016. The average borrowings under the Credit Facility for the year ended December 31, 2016 were \$106.6 million.

For the year ended December 31, 2015, the weighted average effective interest rate under the Credit Facility was approximately 2.9% (approximately 3.5% including commitment fees and other loan fees). Interest is paid quarterly in arrears. The Company recorded interest and fee expense on the Credit Facility of \$3.6 million for the year ended December 31, 2015, of which \$3.0 million was interest expense, \$0.5 million was amortization of loan fees paid on the Credit Facility, and the remainder related to commitment fees on the unused portion of the Credit Facility and loan administration fees. The Company paid \$3.1 million in interest expense and unused commitment fees for the year ended December 31, 2015. The average borrowings under the Credit Facility for the year ended December 31, 2015 were \$102.8 million.

For the year ended December 31, 2014, the weighted average effective interest rate under the Credit Facility was approximately 3.2% (approximately 3.9% including commitment fees on the unused portion and other loan fees for the Credit Facility). Interest is paid quarterly in arrears. The Company recorded interest and fee expense of \$4.1 million for the year ended December 31, 2014, of which \$3.3 million was interest expense, \$0.6 million was amortization of loan fees paid on the Credit Facility, and the remainder related to



TABLE OF CONTENTS

commitment fees on the unused portion of the Credit Facility and loan administration fees. The Company paid \$3.6 million in interest expense and unused commitment fees for the year ended December 31, 2014. The average borrowings under the Credit Facility for the year ended December 31, 2014 were \$103.7 million.

## **SBA-guaranteed Debentures**

Due to the SBIC subsidiary's status as a licensed SBIC, we have the ability to issue debentures guaranteed by the SBA at favorable interest rates. Under the regulations applicable to SBIC funds, an SBIC can have outstanding debentures guaranteed by the SBA subject to a regulatory leverage limit, up to two times the amount of regulatory capital. As of both December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, the SBIC subsidiary had \$32.5 million in regulatory capital, as such term is defined by the SBA.

As a BDC, we are only allowed to employ leverage to the extent that our asset coverage, as defined in the 1940 Act, equals at least 200% after giving effect to such leverage. The amount of leverage that we employ at any time depends on our assessment of the market and other factors at the time of any proposed borrowing.

On August 12, 2014, we obtained exemptive relief from the SEC to permit us to exclude the debt of the SBIC subsidiary guaranteed by the SBA from our 200% asset coverage test under the 1940 Act. The exemptive relief provides us with increased flexibility under the 200% asset coverage test by permitting us to borrow up to \$65 million (based on current regulatory capital, as such term is defined by the SBA, of \$32.5 million) more than we would otherwise be able to absent the receipt of this exemptive relief.

On a stand-alone basis, the SBIC subsidiary held \$106.3 million and \$99.1 million in assets at December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, respectively, which accounted for approximately 28.0% and 27.0% of our total consolidated assets at December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, respectively.

Debentures guaranteed by the SBA have fixed interest rates that equal prevailing 10-year Treasury Note rates plus a market spread and have a maturity of ten years with interest payable semi-annually. The principal amount of the debentures is not required to be paid before maturity, but may be pre-paid at any time with no prepayment penalty. As of both December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, the SBIC subsidiary had \$65,000,000 of SBA-guaranteed debentures outstanding, which mature ten years from issuance. The first maturity related to the SBIC-guaranteed debentures does not occur until 2025, and the remaining weighted average duration of all of our outstanding SBA-guaranteed debentures is approximately 8.9 years as of December 31, 2016.

As of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, the carrying amount of the SBA-guaranteed debentures approximated their fair value. The fair values of the SBA-guaranteed debentures are determined in accordance with ASC 820, which defines fair value in terms of the price that would be paid to transfer a liability in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date under current market conditions. The fair value of the SBA-guaranteed debentures are estimated based upon market interest rates for our own borrowings or entities with similar credit risk, adjusted for nonperformance risk, if any. At December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015 the SBA-guaranteed debentures would be deemed to be Level 3, as defined in Note 6 to our Consolidated Financial Statements.

As of December 31, 2016, the Company has incurred \$2.2 million in financing costs related to the SBA-guaranteed debentures. As of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, \$1.7 million and \$2.0 million of prepaid financing costs had yet to be amortized, respectively. These prepaid loan fees are presented on the consolidated statement of assets and liabilities as a deduction from the debt liability as required by ASU No. 2015-3. See Note 1 to our

Consolidated Financial Statements for further discussion.

For the year ended December 31, 2016, the weighted average effective interest rate for the SBA-guaranteed debentures was approximately 2.9% (approximately 3.4% including loan fees). Interest is paid semi-annually. The Company recorded interest and fee expense on the SBA-guaranteed debentures of \$2.2 million for the year ended December 31, 2016, of which \$1.9 million was interest expense, and \$0.3 million was amortization of loan fees. The Company paid \$1.5 million of interest expense during the year ended December 31, 2016. The average borrowings of SBA-guaranteed debentures for the year ended December 31, 2016 were \$65.0 million.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

For the year ended December 31, 2015, the weighted average effective interest rate for the SBA-guaranteed debentures was approximately 2.2% (approximately 3.0% including loan fees). Interest is paid semi-annually. The Company recorded interest and fee expense on the SBA-guaranteed debentures of \$0.8 million for the year ended December 31, 2015, of which \$0.6 million was interest expense, and \$0.2 million was amortization of loan fees. The Company paid \$0.3 million of interest expense during year ended December 31, 2015. The average borrowings of SBA-guaranteed debentures for the year ended December 31, 2015 were \$25.4 million.

For the year ended December 31, 2014, the weighted average effective interest rate for the SBA-guaranteed debentures was approximately 1.0% (approximately 2.3% including loan fees), which reflects a lower pre-pooling rate that increases when the debentures pool in March and September. Interest is paid semi-annually. The Company recorded interest and fee expense on the SBA-guaranteed debentures of \$0.1 million for the year ended December 31, 2014, which included interest expense and amortization of loan fees. The Company paid no interest expense during the year ended December 31, 2014. The average borrowings of SBA-guaranteed debentures for the year ended December 31, 2014 were \$13.1 million.

## **Notes**

On May 5, 2014, the Company closed a public offering of \$25.0 million in aggregate principal amount of 6.50% Notes. The Notes mature on April 30, 2019, and may be redeemed in whole or in part at any time or from time to time at the Company's option on or after April 30, 2016. The Notes bear interest at a rate of 6.50% per year payable quarterly on February 15, May 15, August 15 and November 15, of each year. The Notes are unsecured obligations and rank pari passu with our current and future unsecured indebtedness; senior to any of our future indebtedness that expressly provides it is subordinated to the Notes; effectively subordinated to all of our existing and future secured indebtedness, to the extent of the value of the assets securing such indebtedness, including borrowings under our Credit Facility; and structurally subordinated to all existing and future indebtedness and other obligations of any of our subsidiaries, including without limitation, the indebtedness of the SBIC subsidiary. The net proceeds to the Company from the sale of the Notes, after underwriting discounts and offering expenses, were approximately \$24.1 million. The Company used all of the net proceeds from this offering to repay a portion of the amount outstanding under the Credit Facility. On both December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, the carrying amount of the Notes was approximately \$25.0 million and the fair value of the Notes was approximately \$25.2 million and \$24.6 million, respectively. The Notes are listed on New York Stock Exchange under the trading symbol `SCQ`. The fair value of the Notes is based on the closing price of the security, which is a Level 2 input under ASC 820 due to sufficient trading volume.

In connection with the issuance of the Notes, we incurred \$0.9 million of fees which are being amortized over the term of the Notes. As of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015 \$0.4 million and \$0.6 million of such prepaid loan structure fees and administration fees had yet to be amortized, respectively. These financing costs are presented on the consolidated statement of assets and liabilities as a deduction from the debt liability as required by ASU No. 2015-3. See Note 1 to our Consolidated Financial Statements for further discussion.

For the year ended December 31, 2016, the Company incurred interest and fee expense on the Notes of \$1.8 million, of which \$1.6 million was interest expense and the remainder related to amortization of loan fees paid on the Notes and administration fees. The Company paid \$1.6 million in interest expense on the Notes during the period.

For the year ended December 31, 2015, the Company incurred interest and fee expense on the Notes of \$1.8 million, of which \$1.6 million was interest expense and the remainder related to amortization of loan fees paid on the Notes and administration fees. The Company paid \$1.6 million in interest expense on the Notes during the

period.

For the period from May 5, 2014 to December 31, 2014, the Company incurred interest and fee expense on the Notes of \$1.1 million, of which \$1.0 million was interest expense and the remainder related to amortization of loan fees paid on the Notes and administration fees. The Company paid \$0.9 million in interest expense on the Notes during the period.

74

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The indenture and supplements thereto relating to the Notes contain certain covenants, including but not limited to (i) a requirement that the Company comply with the asset coverage requirements of the 1940 Act or any successor provisions, and (ii) a requirement to provide financial information to the holders of the Notes and the trustee under the indenture if the Company should no longer be subject to the reporting requirements under the Exchange Act.

## Contractual Obligations

As of December 31, 2016, our future fixed commitments for cash payments on contractual obligations for each of the next five years and thereafter are as follows:

	Total	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 and thereafter
	(dollars in thousands)						
Credit facility payable	\$ 116,000	\$	116,000	\$			
Notes payable	\$ 25,000			25,000			
SBA-guaranteed debentures	\$ 65,000						65,000
	\$ 206,000	\$	\$ 116,000	\$ 25,000	\$	\$	\$ 65,000

## Off-Balance Sheet Arrangements

We may be a party to financial instruments with off-balance sheet risk in the normal course of business to meet the financial needs of our portfolio companies. As of December 31, 2016, our only off-balance sheet arrangements consisted of \$1.9 million of unfunded commitments to provide debt financing to two of our portfolio companies. As of December 31, 2015, our only off-balance sheet arrangements consisted of a \$3.3 million unfunded commitment to provide debt financing to three of our portfolio companies.

## Regulated Investment Company Status and Dividends

We have elected to be treated as a RIC under Subchapter M of the Code. So long as we maintain our status as a RIC, we will not be taxed on our investment company taxable income or realized net capital gains, to the extent that such taxable income or gains are distributed, or deemed to be distributed, to stockholders on a timely basis.

Taxable income generally differs from net income for financial reporting purposes due to temporary and permanent differences in the recognition of income and expenses, and generally excludes net unrealized appreciation or depreciation until realized. Dividends declared and paid by us in a year may differ from taxable income for that year as such dividends may include the distribution of current year taxable income or the distribution of prior year taxable income carried forward into and distributed in the current year. Distributions also may include returns of capital.

To qualify for RIC tax treatment, we must, among other things, distribute, with respect to each taxable year, at least 90% of our investment company net taxable income (i.e., our net ordinary income and our realized net short-term capital gains in excess of realized net long-term capital losses, if any). If we maintain our qualification as a RIC, we must also satisfy certain distribution requirements each calendar year in order to avoid a federal excise tax on or undistributed earnings of a RIC.

We intend to distribute to our stockholders between 90% and 100% of our annual taxable income (which includes our taxable interest and fee income). However, the covenants contained in the Credit Facility may prohibit us from

making distributions to our stockholders, and, as a result, could hinder our ability to satisfy the distribution requirement. In addition, we may retain for investment some or all of our net taxable capital gains (i.e., realized net long-term capital gains in excess of realized net short-term capital losses) and treat such amounts as deemed distributions to our stockholders. If we do this, our stockholders will be treated as if they received actual distributions of the capital gains we retained and then reinvested the net after-tax proceeds in our common stock. Our stockholders also may be eligible to claim tax credits (or, in certain circumstances, tax refunds) equal to their allocable share of the tax we paid on the capital gains deemed distributed to them. To the extent our taxable earnings for a fiscal taxable year fall below the total amount of our dividends for that fiscal year, a portion of those dividend distributions may be deemed a return of capital to our stockholders.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

We may not be able to achieve operating results that will allow us to make distributions at a specific level or to increase the amount of these distributions from time to time. In addition, we may be limited in our ability to make distributions due to the asset coverage test for borrowings applicable to us as a business development company under the 1940 Act and due to provisions in Credit Facility. We cannot assure stockholders that they will receive any distributions or distributions at a particular level.

In accordance with certain applicable Treasury regulations and private letter rulings issued by the Internal Revenue Service, a RIC may treat a distribution of its own stock as fulfilling its RIC distribution requirements if each stockholder may elect to receive his or her entire distribution in either cash or stock of the RIC, subject to a limitation that the aggregate amount of cash to be distributed to all stockholders must be at least 20% of the aggregate declared distribution. If too many stockholders elect to receive cash, each stockholder electing to receive cash must receive a pro rata amount of cash (with the balance of the distribution paid in stock). In no event will any stockholder, electing to receive cash, receive less than 20% of his or her entire distribution in cash. If these and certain other requirements are met, for U.S. federal income tax purposes, the amount of the dividend paid in stock will be equal to the amount of cash that could have been received instead of stock. We have no current intention of paying dividends in shares of our stock in accordance with these Treasury regulations or private letter rulings.

## **Recent Accounting Pronouncements**

See Note 1 to the consolidated financial statements for a description of recent accounting pronouncements, if any, including the expected dates of adoption and the anticipated impact on the financial statements.

## **Critical Accounting Policies**

The preparation of our financial statements requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amounts of assets, liabilities, revenues and expenses. Changes in the economic environment, financial markets and any other parameters used in determining such estimates could cause actual results to differ. In addition to the discussion below, our significant accounting policies are further described in the notes to the financial statements.

## **Valuation of portfolio investments**

As a BDC, we generally invest in illiquid loans and securities including debt and equity securities of middle-market companies. Under procedures established by our board of directors, we value investments for which market quotations are readily available at such market quotations. We obtain these market values from an independent pricing service. Debt and equity securities that are not publicly traded or whose market prices are not readily available are valued at fair value as determined in good faith by our board of directors. Such determination of fair values may involve subjective judgments and estimates, although we engage independent valuation providers to review the valuation of each portfolio investment that does not have a readily available market quotation at least once each quarter.

Investments purchased within 90 days of maturity are valued at cost plus accreted discount, or minus amortized premium, which approximates value. With respect to unquoted securities, our board of directors, together with our independent valuation advisors, values each investment considering, among other measures, discounted cash flow models, comparisons of financial ratios of peer companies that are public and other factors.

When an external event such as a purchase transaction, public offering or subsequent equity sale occurs, our board of directors uses the pricing indicated by the external event to corroborate and/or assist us in our valuation. Because there

is not a readily available market for substantially all of the investments in our portfolio, we value most of our portfolio investments at fair value as determined in good faith by our board of directors using a documented valuation policy and a consistently applied valuation process. Due to the inherent uncertainty of determining the fair value of investments that do not have a readily available market value, the fair value of our investments may differ significantly from the values that would have been used had a readily available market value existed for such investments, and the differences could be material.

76

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

With respect to investments for which market quotations are not readily available, our board of directors undertakes a multi-step valuation process each quarter, as described below:

Our quarterly valuation process begins with each portfolio company or investment being initially valued by the investment professionals of Stellus Capital Management responsible for the portfolio investment;

Preliminary valuation conclusions are then documented and discussed with our senior management and Stellus Capital Management;

The audit committee of our board of directors then reviews these preliminary valuations;

At least once each quarter, the valuation for each portfolio investment is reviewed by an independent valuation firm; and

The board of directors then discusses valuations and determines the fair value of each investment in our portfolio in good faith, based on the input of Stellus Capital Management, the independent valuation firm and the audit committee.

### **Revenue recognition**

We record interest income on an accrual basis to the extent that we expect to collect such amounts. For loans and debt securities with contractual PIK interest, which represents contractual interest accrued and added to the loan balance that generally becomes due at maturity, we do not accrue PIK interest if the portfolio company valuation indicates that such PIK interest is not collectible. We will not accrue interest on loans and debt securities if we have reason to doubt our ability to collect such interest. Loan origination fees, original issue discount and market discount or premium are capitalized, and we then accrete or amortize such amounts using the effective interest method as interest income.

Upon the prepayment of a loan or debt security, any unamortized loan origination is recorded as interest income. We record prepayment premiums on loans and debt securities as interest income. Dividend income, if any, will be recognized on the ex-dividend date.

### **Net realized gains or losses and net change in unrealized appreciation or depreciation**

We measure realized gains or losses by the difference between the net proceeds from the repayment, sale, or other disposition and the amortized cost basis of the investment, without regard to unrealized appreciation or depreciation previously recognized. Net change in unrealized appreciation or depreciation reflects the change in portfolio investment values during the reporting period, including any reversal of previously recorded unrealized appreciation or depreciation, when gains or losses are realized.

### **Unrealized Gains Incentive Fee**

Under GAAP, the Company calculates the unrealized gains incentive fee payable to the Advisor as if the Company had realized all investments at their fair values as of the reporting date. Accordingly, the Company accrues a provisional unrealized gains incentive fee taking into account any unrealized gains or losses. As the provisional incentive fee is subject to the performance of investments until there is a realization event, the amount of provisional unrealized gains incentive fee accrued at a reporting date may vary from the incentive fee that is ultimately realized and the differences could be material.

### **Payment-in-Kind Interest**

We have investments in our portfolio that contain a PIK interest provision. Any PIK interest is added to the principal

balance of such investments and is recorded as income, if the portfolio company valuation indicates that such PIK interest is collectible. In order to maintain our status as a RIC, substantially all of this income must be paid out to stockholders in the form of dividends, even if we have not collected any cash.

## **Recent Developments**

### **Investment Portfolio**

On January 5, 2017, we sold our position in Securus Technologies Holdings, Inc for proceeds of \$8.4 million. We realized a loss of \$41 thousand upon the sale.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

On January 25, 2017, we received full repayment on the first lien term loan of Momentum Telecom, Inc for proceeds of \$15.3 million, including a \$0.2 million premium.

On February 1, 2017, our first lien term loan in Glori Energy Production, Inc was converted to an equity position at par equal to \$1.7 million.

On February 3, 2017, we invested \$6.3 million in the unsecured term loan of Time Manufacturing, Inc, a global manufacturer of vehicle-mounted aerial lift equipment. Additionally, we invested \$0.5 million in the equity of the company.

On February 8, 2017, we received full repayment on the second lien term loan of MTC Intermediate Holdco for proceeds of \$10.4 million, including a \$0.1 million prepayment fee. Additionally, we received a dividend of \$0.7 million in proceeds for the equity in MTC Parent, LP.

On March 1, 2017, we received full repayment on the first lien term loan of 360 Holdings Corp for proceeds of \$4.0 million.

**Credit Facility**

The outstanding balance under the Credit Facility as of March 8, 2017 was \$103.8 million.

**Dividend Declared**

On January 13, 2017, the Company s board of directors declared a regular monthly dividend for each of January 2017, February 2017 and March 2017 as follows:

Declared	Ex-Dividend Date	Record Date	Payment Date	Amount per Share
1/13/2017	1/27/2017	1/31/2017	2/15/2017	\$ 0.1133
1/13/2017	2/24/2017	2/28/2017	3/15/2017	\$ 0.1133
1/13/2017	3/29/2017	3/31/2017	4/14/2017	\$ 0.1133

Item 7A.

**Quantitative and Qualitative Disclosures About Market Risk**

We are subject to financial market risks, including changes in interest rates. For the years ended December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, 77% and 75%, or 48 and 34 of the loans in our portfolio bore interest at floating rates, respectively. For the year ended December 31, 2016, 45 of these 48 loans in our portfolio have interest rate floors, which have effectively converted the loans to fixed rate loans in the current interest rate environment. In the future, we expect other loans in our portfolio will have floating rates. Assuming that the Statement of Assets and Liabilities as of December 31, 2016, were to remain constant and no actions were taken to alter the existing interest rate sensitivity, a hypothetical one percent increase in LIBOR would increase our net income approximately \$1.7 million, due to the current floors in place. A hypothetical decrease in LIBOR would decrease our net income by approximately \$36K due to the aforementioned floors in place. Although we believe that this measure is indicative of our sensitivity to interest rate changes, it does not adjust for potential changes in credit quality, size and composition of the assets on the balance sheet and other business developments that could affect net increase in net assets resulting from operations, or net income. Accordingly, no assurances can be given that actual results would not differ materially from the potential outcome simulated by this estimate. We may hedge against interest rate fluctuations by using standard hedging instruments such as futures, options and forward contracts subject to the requirements of the 1940 Act. While hedging activities may insulate us against adverse changes in interest rates, they may also limit our ability to participate in the

benefits of lower interest rates with respect to our portfolio of investments. For the years ended December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, we did not engage in hedging activities.

Changes in interest rates will affect our cost of funding. Our interest expense will be affected by changes in the published LIBOR rate in connection with the Credit Facility. As of December 31, 2016, we had not entered into any interest rate hedging arrangements. At December 31, 2016, based on our applicable levels of our Credit Facility, a 1% increase in interest rates would have decreased our net investment income by approximately \$1.08 million for the year ended December 31, 2016.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Item 8. Financial Statements and Supplementary Data

**Index to Financial Statements**

	Page
<u>Report of Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm</u>	<u>80</u>
<u>Consolidated Statements of Assets and Liabilities as of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015</u>	<u>81</u>
<u>Consolidated Statements of Operations for the years ended December 31, 2016, 2015 and 2014</u>	<u>82</u>
<u>Consolidated Statements of Changes in Net Assets for the years ended December 31, 2016, 2015 and 2014</u>	<u>83</u>
<u>Consolidated Statements of Cash Flows for the years ended December 31, 2016, 2015 and 2014</u>	<u>84</u>
<u>Consolidated Schedule of Investments as of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015</u>	<u>86</u>
<u>Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements</u>	<u>99</u>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# REPORT OF INDEPENDENT REGISTERED PUBLIC ACCOUNTING FIRM

Board of Directors and Shareholders  
Stellus Capital Investment Corporation

We have audited the accompanying consolidated statements of assets and liabilities of Stellus Capital Investment Corporation (a Maryland corporation) and subsidiaries (the Company), including the schedules of investments as of December 31, 2016 and 2015, and the related consolidated statements of operations, changes in net assets, and cash flows for each of the three years in the period ended December 31, 2016 and the financial highlights (see Note 8) for each of the four years in the period ended December 31, 2016 and for the period from Inception (May 18, 2012) through December 31, 2012. These financial statements and financial highlights are the responsibility of the Company's management. Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these financial statements and financial highlights based on our audits.

We conducted our audits in accordance with the standards of the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (United States). Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement. We were not engaged to perform an audit of the Company's internal control over financial reporting. Our audits included consideration of internal control over financial reporting as a basis for designing audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Company's internal control over financial reporting. Accordingly, we express no such opinion. An audit also includes examining, on a test basis, evidence supporting the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements, assessing the accounting principles used and significant estimates made by management, as well as evaluating the overall financial statement presentation. Our procedures included verification by confirmation of securities as of December 31, 2016 and 2015, by correspondence with the portfolio companies and custodians, or by other appropriate auditing procedures where replies were not received. We believe that our audits provide a reasonable basis for our opinion.

In our opinion, the consolidated financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Stellus Capital Investment Corporation and subsidiaries as of December 31, 2016 and 2015, and the results of their operations and their cash flows for each of the three years in the period ended December 31, 2016 and the financial highlights for each of the four years in the period ended December 31, 2016 and for the period from Inception (May 18, 2012) through December 31, 2012 in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

As discussed in Note 1 to the consolidated financial statements, the Company adopted new accounting guidance in 2016, related to the presentation of debt issuance costs.

/s/ GRANT THORNTON LLP

Houston, Texas  
March 9, 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# STELLUS CAPITAL INVESTMENT CORPORATION

## CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

	December 31, 2016	December 31, 2015
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Non-controlled, non-affiliated investments, at fair value (amortized cost of \$362,217,251 and \$364,212,459, respectively)	\$365,625,891	\$349,017,697
Cash and cash equivalents	9,194,129	10,875,790
Receivable for sales and repayments of investments		10,000
Interest receivable	4,601,742	4,720,031
Deferred offering costs		261,761
Accounts receivable	748	7,684
Prepaid expenses	456,219	475,449
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$379,878,729</b>	<b>\$365,368,412</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Notes Payable	\$24,565,891	\$24,381,108
Credit facility payable	115,171,208	108,197,373
SBA Debentures	63,342,036	63,015,846
Dividends payable	1,413,982	1,413,982
Base management fees payable	1,608,295	1,518,779
Incentive fees payable	1,353,271	607,956
Interest payable	973,812	570,189
Unearned revenue	19,955	36,877
Administrative services payable	272,511	397,799
Deferred Tax Liability	8,593	381,723
Other accrued expenses and liabilities	267,390	195,676
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$208,996,944</b>	<b>\$200,717,308</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>\$170,881,785</b>	<b>\$164,651,104</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		
Common Stock, par value \$0.01 per share (100,000,000 shares authorized, 12,479,959 and 12,479,960 shares issued and outstanding, respectively)	\$12,480	\$12,480
Paid-in capital	180,994,723	180,994,752
Accumulated net realized (loss)	(13,089,671 )	
Distributions in excess of net investment income	(435,794 )	(779,643 )
Net unrealized appreciation (depreciation) on investments and cash equivalents, net of deferred tax liability of \$8,593 and \$381,723 as of December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, respectively <sup>(1)</sup>	3,400,047	(15,576,485 )
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>\$170,881,785</b>	<b>\$164,651,104</b>
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$379,878,729</b>	<b>\$365,368,412</b>

**Net Asset Value Per Share**

\$13.69

\$13.19

(1)

See Note 13 for a discussion of Deferred Taxes.

81

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# STELLUS CAPITAL INVESTMENT CORPORATION

## CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF OPERATIONS

	For the year ended December 31, 2016	For the year ended December 31, 2015	For the year ended December 31, 2014
<b>INVESTMENT INCOME</b>			
Interest income	\$38,176,617	\$34,643,791	\$31,637,094
Other income	1,313,580	514,768	687,753
<b>Total Investment Income</b>	<b>\$39,490,197</b>	<b>\$35,158,559</b>	<b>\$32,324,847</b>
<b>OPERATING EXPENSES</b>			
Management fees	\$6,281,863	5,841,267	5,202,990
Valuation fees	397,330	356,971	384,957
Administrative services expenses	1,045,648	1,029,368	1,195,566
Incentive fees	4,275,436	3,975,198	3,122,890
Professional fees	712,524	596,357	744,547
Directors fees	324,000	333,000	373,000
Insurance expense	471,427	473,963	482,963
Interest expense and other fees	7,992,185	6,177,015	5,315,325
Deferred offering costs	261,761		
Other general and administrative expenses	415,822	474,625	389,738
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$22,177,996</b>	<b>\$19,257,764</b>	<b>\$17,211,976</b>
Waiver of Incentive Fees		(646,333 )	(1,399,226 )
<b>Total expenses, net of fee waiver</b>	<b>22,177,996</b>	<b>18,611,431</b>	<b>15,812,750</b>
<b>Net Investment Income</b>	<b>\$17,312,201</b>	<b>\$16,547,128</b>	<b>\$16,512,097</b>
<b>Net Realized Gain (loss) on Investments and Cash Equivalents</b>	<b>(13,089,671)</b>	<b>421,726</b>	<b>445,157</b>
<b>Net Change in Unrealized Appreciation (Depreciation) on Investments and Cash Equivalents</b>	<b>18,603,401</b>	<b>(9,204,717 )</b>	<b>(6,489,990 )</b>
<b>Benefit (provision) for taxes on net realized loss or net unrealized gain on investments at Taxable Subsidiaries</b>	<b>373,131</b>	<b>(93,601 )</b>	<b>(288,122 )</b>
<b>Net Increase in Net Assets Resulting from Operations</b>	<b>\$23,199,062</b>	<b>\$7,670,536</b>	<b>\$10,179,142</b>
<b>Net Investment Income Per Share</b>	<b>\$1.39</b>	<b>\$1.33</b>	<b>\$1.34</b>
<b>Net Increase in Net Assets Resulting from Operations Per Share</b>	<b>\$1.86</b>	<b>\$0.61</b>	<b>\$0.83</b>
<b>Weighted Average Shares of Common Stock Outstanding</b>	<b>12,479,959</b>	<b>12,479,961</b>	<b>12,281,178</b>
<b>Distributions Per Share</b>	<b>\$1.36</b>	<b>\$1.36</b>	<b>\$1.43</b>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# STELLUS CAPITAL INVESTMENT CORPORATION

## CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF CHANGES IN NET ASSETS

	For the year ended December 31, 2016	For the year ended December 31, 2015	For the year ended December 31, 2014
<b>Increase in Net Assets Resulting from Operations</b>			
Net investment income	\$ 17,312,201	\$ 16,547,128	\$ 16,512,097
Net realized gain (loss) on investments and cash equivalents	(13,089,671 )	421,726	445,157
Net change in unrealized appreciation (depreciation) on investments and cash equivalents	18,603,401	(9,204,717 )	(6,489,990 )
Benefit (provision) for taxes on net realized loss or unrealized depreciation (appreciation) on investments at Taxable Subsidiaries	373,131	(93,601 )	(288,122 )
<b>Net Increase in Net Assets Resulting from Operations</b>	\$ 23,199,062	\$ 7,670,536	\$ 10,179,142
<b>Stockholder distributions from:</b>			
Net investment income	(16,968,350 )	(16,547,158 )	(16,029,081 )
Net realized capital gains		(421,726 )	(1,472,549 )
<b>Total Distributions</b>	\$ (16,968,350 )	\$ (16,968,884 )	\$ (17,501,630 )
<b>Capital share transactions</b>			
Issuance of common stock			5,087,335
Reinvestments of stockholder distributions			398,505
Sales load			(75,510 )
Offering costs			(29,904 )
Partial Share Redemption	(31 )		
<b>Net increase in net assets resulting from capital share transactions</b>	\$ (31 )	\$	\$ 5,380,426
<b>Total increase (decrease) in net assets</b>	\$ 6,230,681	\$ (9,298,348 )	\$ (1,942,062 )
<b>Net assets at beginning of year/period</b>	\$ 164,651,104	\$ 173,949,452	\$ 175,891,514
<b>Net assets at end of year/period (includes \$435,794 and \$779,643 and \$779,643 of distributions in excess of net investment income, respectively)</b>	\$ 170,881,785	\$ 164,651,104	\$ 173,949,452

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# STELLUS CAPITAL INVESTMENT CORPORATION

## CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF CASH FLOWS

	For the year ended December 31, 2016	For the year ended December 31, 2015	For the year ended December 31, 2014
<b>Cash flows from operating activities</b>			
Net increase in net assets resulting from operations	\$23,199,062	\$7,670,536	\$10,179,142
Adjustments to reconcile net increase in net assets resulting from operations to net cash used in operating activities:			
Purchases of investments	(65,661,034)	(133,661,491)	(97,954,324)
Proceeds from sales and repayments of investments	55,949,177	93,289,529	54,870,360
Net change in unrealized appreciation (depreciation) on investments	(18,603,401)	9,204,717	6,490,090
Deferred tax provision (benefit)	(373,131)	93,601	288,122
Increase in investments due to PIK	(243,766)	(439,052)	(730,036)
Amortization of premium and accretion of discount, net	(1,128,511)	(1,034,240)	(686,985)
Amortization of loan structure fees	523,835	472,003	607,404
Amortization of deferred financing costs	326,190	210,064	90,614
Amortization of loan fees on SBIC debentures	184,783	204,980	37,117
Net realized loss (gain) on investments	13,089,341	(421,726)	(450,031)
Deferred offering costs	261,761		
Changes in other assets and liabilities			
Decrease (increase) in interest receivable	118,289	362,634	(368,753)
Decrease in receivable for affiliated transaction			43,450
(Increase) Decrease in accounts receivable	6,936	(6,988)	(696)
Decrease (increase) in prepaid expenses and fees	19,230	(56,166)	(7,962)
Increase in Management Fees payable	89,516	158,760	183,289
Decrease in directors fees payable			(96,000)
Increase (decrease) in incentive fees payable	745,315	(513,600)	64,614
Increase (decrease) in administrative services payable	(125,288)	(193,945)	328,519
Increase in interest payable	403,623	223,985	112,153
Increase (decrease) in unearned revenue	(16,921)	(120,526)	10,438
Increase (decrease) in other accrued expenses and liabilities	71,714	112,224	(179,426)
Net cash provided by (used in) operating activities	\$8,836,720	\$(24,444,701)	\$(27,168,901)

TABLE OF CONTENTS**STELLUS CAPITAL INVESTMENT CORPORATION****CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF CASH FLOWS (continued)**

	For the year ended December 31, 2016	For the year ended December 31, 2015	For the year ended December 31, 2014
<b>Cash flows from financing activities</b>			
Proceeds from notes issued			25,000,000
Proceeds from SBA Debentures		47,567,813	15,855,937
Financing costs paid on notes issued			(919,570 )
Financing costs paid on Credit Facility	(50,000 )		(795,628 )
Financing costs paid on SBA Debentures		(325,000 )	(325,000 )
Proceeds from the issuance of common stock			5,116,985
Sales load for common stock issued			(75,510 )
Offering costs paid for common stock issued			(116,150 )
Stockholder distributions paid	(16,968,350 )	(16,968,885 )	(15,689,142 )
Borrowings under credit facility	56,500,000	105,000,000	105,250,000
Repayments of credit facility	(50,000,000 )	(102,000,000)	(108,750,000)
Repayments of short-term loan			(9,000,000 )
Partial Share Redemption	(31 )		
Net cash provided by (used in) financing activities	\$(10,518,381 )	\$33,273,928	\$15,551,922
Net increase (decrease) in cash and cash equivalents	(1,681,661 )	8,829,227	(11,616,979 )
Cash and cash equivalents balance at beginning of year/period	10,875,790	2,046,563	13,663,542
Cash and cash equivalents balance at end of year/period	\$9,194,129	\$10,875,790	\$2,046,563
<b>Supplemental and non-cash financing activities</b>			
Non-cash purchase of investment through repayment of investment	\$	\$4,251,032	\$
Fees paid on SBA Debentures through proceeds	\$	\$1,182,187	\$394,063
Shares issued pursuant to Dividend Reinvestment Plan	\$	\$	\$398,505
Interest expense paid	\$6,548,754	\$5,010,984	\$4,465,618

TABLE OF CONTENTS**Stellus Capital Investment Corporation****Consolidated Schedule of Investments  
December 31, 2016**

Footnotes	Lien	Coupon	LIBOR floor	Cash	PIK	Maturity	Headquarters/ Industry	Principal Amount/ Shares	Amortized Cost	Fair Value
(2)							Deer Park, TX			
(2)(3)	Second Lien	L+10.50%	1.00%	11.50%		3/5/2020	Chemicals, Plastics, & Rubber	\$5,325,237	\$5,252,426	\$5,252,426
(4)	Equity							375,000 units	375,000	399,000
									5,627,426	5,627,426
							Amsterdam, OH			
(4)	Equity						Environmental Industries	517 shares	517	525,000
(4)	Equity							517 shares	517,439	524,000
									517,956	525,000
							Denver, CO			
(3)	Second Lien	L+8.50 %	1.25 %	9.75 %		4/3/2019	Beverage, Food, & Tobacco	\$8,000,000	7,928,373	8,000,000
							Hauppauge, NY			
(4)(14)	Unsecured						Services: Consumer	\$1,000,000	1,000,000	722,000
							Rochester, NY			
(3)	Second	L+9.50 %	1.00%	10.50%		6/5/2019	Telecommunications	\$7,500,000	7,422,928	7,422,928

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		Lien									
(4)	Equity							8,932 units	525,000	152	
									7,947,928	7,5	
Murrysville, PA											
(12)	First Lien	L+8.50 %	0.50%	9.03 %	12/31/2020	Automotive	\$101,911	100,207	101		
(2)(12)	First Lien	L+8.50 %	0.50%	9.03 %	12/31/2020		\$7,949,027	7,785,147	7,9		
(4)	Equity						149,828 shares	149,828	250		
								8,035,182	8,3		
Camden, NJ											
(13)	First Lien	L+6.50 %	1.00%	8.99 %	7/16/2020	Education	\$12,500,000	12,404,725	12,		
New York, NY											
(5)	Unsecured	12.00 %		12.00%	5/31/2018	Finance	\$12,500,000	12,401,505	12,		
(5)	Unsecured	12.00 %		12.00%	5/31/2018		\$2,000,000	1,980,173	1,9		
(5)	Unsecured	12.00 %		12.00%	5/31/2018		\$5,000,000	4,960,146	4,9		
(4)(5)	Equity						38,893 units	557,143	671		
								19,898,967	20,		

86

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Stellus Capital Investment Corporation**

**Consolidated Schedule of Investments (continued)  
December 31, 2016**

87

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Stellus Capital Investment Corporation**

**Consolidated Schedule of Investments (continued)  
December 31, 2016**

88

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Stellus Capital Investment Corporation**

**Consolidated Schedule of Investments (continued)  
December 31, 2016**