

The complaint

Mr D complains that Bilderlings Pay Limited (trading as Bilderlings) has withheld €546 after it closed his account.

What happened

Mr D had an account with Bilderlings. But Mr D has been added to the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)'s Specially Designated and Blocked Person (SDN) List. Bilderlings has closed Mr D's account and hasn't allowed him to withdraw the funds in the account. Unhappy with this, Mr D complained to Bilderlings and referred the complaint to us.

Our investigator looked at the complaint and didn't think it should be upheld.

Mr D doesn't agree.

The complaint has been referred to me.

What I've decided – and why

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

I don't uphold the complaint. I'll explain why.

Mr D has been listed as an SDN by OFAC. And when I look at the specific sanction OFAC has recorded against Mr D, I note that the US government has also said it can impose blocking sanctions on foreign financial institutions that provide accounts or process payments for any person blocked under the main sanction.

The penalties for non-compliance with these sanctions can be significant, including heavy fines and loss of access to the US banking system, including the ability to process transactions in US dollars. For these reasons, financial businesses put in place systems and controls to ensure compliance with any relevant sanctions regimes and to mitigate the risk of non-compliance with them. These measures are risk based and depend on the risk appetite of the individual business. I'm satisfied that Bilderlings is entitled to determine its own risk appetite and that this is largely a matter of its own commercial discretion. The main question for me is whether Bilderlings has correctly applied these policies and that this is fair in the circumstances of Mr D's complaint.

Bilderlings says it screens customers against sanctions lists, including those issued by OFAC. It says that until these restrictions are removed, it cannot give Mr D access to these funds. Based on what I've seen, I'm satisfied Bilderlings is acting in line with its policies in blocking access to these funds.

I've thought about what Mr D has said about that. He notes that he's not subject to sanctions in the UK. He says this means there's no legal obligation preventing Bilderlings from releasing his funds. He suggests that Bilderlings instead release the funds to a relative, who

is not subject to US sanctions. He feels the amount in question is below any meaningful materiality threshold that would trigger enforcement risk.

But while I recognise that Mr D has his own views about the risk of this transaction, I'm satisfied that Bilderlings is entitled to design its own policies based on its own risk appetite. Given the serious consequences of a breach of US sanctions, I can't conclude that Bilderlings has acted unreasonably here. I'm not going to tell Bilderlings to release Mr D's funds.

My final decision

I don't uphold the complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr D to accept or reject my decision before 2 October 2025.

Rebecca Hardman
Ombudsman