

NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE'S OFFICE REORGANIZES TO PROVIDE MORE HELP

WASHINGTON -- In the first stage of the Internal Revenue Service's reorganization, the National Taxpayer Advocate's office will be realigned and strengthened to provide taxpayers a greater voice inside the IRS.

IRS Commissioner Charles O. Rossotti announced Wednesday the new organization will feature an expanded network of 88 Taxpayer Advocates. In addition, several other new job categories will be created to bolster National Taxpayer Advocate Val Oveson's effort to build a new organization dedicated to helping taxpayers.

"These changes give the National Taxpayer Advocate better tools to serve as the taxpayers' voice inside the IRS," Rossotti said.

The moves reflect changes approved last year by Congress and President Clinton in the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act, which gave the National Taxpayer Advocate's office new powers and responsibilities. The office provides an independent voice inside the IRS, including assisting taxpayers in tax disputes, championing taxpayer's rights and providing recommendations for improving tax administration.

"If taxpayers have problems they can't fix through normal IRS channels, we're the place they can turn to for help," Oveson said. "We're the taxpayers' watchdog at the IRS."

As part of the IRS modernization effort, the National Taxpayer Advocate's office becomes the first part of the agency to be reorganized. Later, other parts of the IRS will shift from a geographically based system in 33 local District offices to a customer-based structure built around four major groups of taxpayers.

The blueprint approved by the National Taxpayer Advocate's office, the IRS Modernization Design Team and the agency's Executive Steering Committee calls for the following changes:

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There will be 74 local Taxpayer Advocates located across the country.

There will be at least one Taxpayer Advocate in each state, and one at each of the 10 IRS Service Centers.

The local advocates will report to nine Area Taxpayer Advocates serving under the National Taxpayer Advocate. This important change adds more independence by allowing advocates to report directly to the National Taxpayer Advocate, a switch from the old standard of serving under IRS District Directors.

Four more Advocates will be added when the new IRS operating divisions are put in place during the agency's reorganization process. These Advocates will be specialists who suggest improvements in the four new divisions: Wage and Investment; Small Business and Self Employed; Large and Mid-Size Business; and Tax Exempt. The IRS will conduct a national search for these four positions.

Caseworkers handling taxpayers' cases through the National Taxpayer Advocate's Problem Resolution Program will now be assigned full-time to the job. Previously, they split time between Taxpayer Advocate casework and other IRS casework.

To reflect the added importance of the National Taxpayer Advocate's organization, job positions will be changed to receive higher pay grades because of increased responsibilities. Management positions in this area also are being redefined to reflect more responsibility and new duties.

IRS employees working under the National Taxpayer Advocate will be able to compete for the new positions being created. This step is being taken because of the expanded job requirements.

Rossotti said the IRS will work closely with the National Treasury Employees Union during this period. The sweeping job changes in the National Taxpayer Advocate's organization will be more pronounced than in other areas during the IRS modernization effort, Rossotti said.

The reorganization in the National Taxpayer Advocate's office represents another step in the IRS's effort to provide better service to taxpayers.

"This new approach will provide people a helping hand from within the IRS," Rossotti said.

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As the changes unfold in the National Taxpayer Advocate's office, people will still be able to get help. If taxpayers have been unable to resolve a problem with the IRS, they can contact the National Taxpayer Advocate's toll-free help line at 1-877-777-4778.

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