

# National Taxpayer Advocate **2025 PURPLE BOOK**

Compilation of Legislative Recommendations  
to Strengthen Taxpayer Rights and  
Improve Tax Administration

**December 31, 2024**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	v
---------------------------	---

### STRENGTHEN TAXPAYER RIGHTS

1. Elevate the Importance of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights by Redesignating It as Section 1 of the Internal Revenue Code .....	1
2. Require the IRS to Timely Process Claims for Credit or Refund .....	3

### IMPROVE THE FILING PROCESS

3. Treat Electronically Submitted Tax Payments and Documents as Timely If Submitted on or Before the Applicable Deadline .....	6
4. Authorize the IRS to Establish Minimum Competency Standards for Federal Tax Return Preparers and Revoke the Identification Numbers of Sanctioned Preparers .....	8
5. Extend the Time for Small Businesses to Make Subchapter S Elections .....	12
6. Adjust Individual Estimated Tax Payment Deadlines to Occur Quarterly .....	14
7. Eliminate Duplicative Reporting Requirements Imposed by the Bank Secrecy Act and the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act .....	16
8. Authorize the Use of Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Grant Funding to Assist Taxpayers With Applications for Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers .....	18

### IMPROVE ASSESSMENT AND COLLECTION PROCEDURES

9. Require That Math Error Notices Describe the Reason(s) for the Adjustment With Specificity, Inform Taxpayers They May Request Abatement Within 60 Days, and Be Mailed by Certified or Registered Mail .....	21
10. Continue to Limit the IRS's Use of "Math Error Authority" to Clear-Cut Categories Specified by Statute .....	23
11. Require Independent Managerial Review and Written Approval Before the IRS May Assert Multiyear Bans Barring Taxpayers From Receiving Certain Tax Credits and Clarify That the Tax Court Has Jurisdiction to Review the Assertion of Multiyear Bans .....	26
12. Give Taxpayers Abroad Additional Time to Request Abatement of a Math Error Assessment .....	29
13. Give Taxpayers Abroad Additional Time to Request a Collection Due Process Hearing and to File a Petition Challenging a Notice of Determination in the Tax Court .....	31
14. Provide That Assessable Penalties Are Subject to Deficiency Procedures .....	33
15. Direct the IRS to Implement an Automated Formula to Identify Taxpayers at Risk of Economic Hardship .....	36
16. Provide That "an Opportunity to Dispute" an IRS-Determined Tax Liability in a Collection Due Process Hearing Includes an Opportunity to Dispute Such Liability in the U.S. Tax Court .....	39

17. Prohibit the IRS from Withholding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Portion of a Taxpayer's Refund to Satisfy Federal Tax Liabilities . . . . .	41
18. Eliminate Installment Agreement User Fees for Low-Income Taxpayers and Those Paying by Direct Debit . . . . .	43
19. Improve Offer in Compromise Program Accessibility by Repealing the Upfront Payment Requirements . . . . .	45
20. Require the IRS to Consider a Taxpayer's Current Income When Determining Whether to Waive or Reimburse an Installment Agreement User Fee . . . . .	47
21. Modify the Requirement That the Office of Chief Counsel Review Certain Offers in Compromise . . . . .	49
22. Require the IRS to Mail Notices at Least Quarterly to Taxpayers With Delinquent Tax Liabilities . . . . .	51
23. Clarify When the Two-Year Period for Requesting Return of Levy Proceeds Begins . . . . .	52
24. Protect Retirement Funds From IRS Levies, Including So-Called "Voluntary" Levies, Absent Flagrant Conduct by a Taxpayer . . . . .	54
25. Provide Taxpayer Protections Before the IRS Recommends the Filing of a Lien Foreclosure Suit on a Principal Residence . . . . .	56
26. Provide Collection Due Process Rights to Third Parties Holding Legal Title to Property Subject to IRS Collection Actions . . . . .	59
27. Extend the Time Limit for Taxpayers to Sue for Damages for Improper Collection Actions . . . . .	62
28. Revise the Private Debt Collection Rules to More Accurately Identify and Protect Taxpayers With Incomes Below 200 Percent of the Federal Poverty Level . . . . .	64

## REFORM PENALTY AND INTEREST PROVISIONS

29. Convert the Estimated Tax Penalty Into an Interest Provision to Properly Reflect Its Substance . . . . .	66
30. Apply a Single Interest Rate to Underpayments of Estimated Tax in the Periods Between Each Installment Due Date . . . . .	68
31. Extend the Reasonable Cause Defense for the Failure-to-File Penalty to Taxpayers Who Rely on Return Preparers to E-File Their Returns . . . . .	70
32. Authorize a Penalty for Tax Return Preparers Who Engage in Fraud or Misconduct by Altering a Taxpayer's Tax Return . . . . .	74
33. Clarify That Supervisory Approval Is Required Under IRC § 6751(b) Before Proposing Penalties . . . . .	76
34. Require an Employee to Determine and a Supervisor to Approve All Negligence Penalties Under IRC § 6662(b)(1) . . . . .	80
35. Modify the Definition of "Willful" for Purposes of Determining Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts Violations and Reduce the Maximum Penalty Amounts . . . . .	83

**STRENGTHEN TAXPAYER RIGHTS BEFORE THE OFFICE OF APPEALS**

36. Require Taxpayers' Consent Before Allowing IRS Counsel or Compliance  
Personnel to Participate in Appeals Conferences . . . . . 86

**STRENGTHEN THE OFFICE OF THE TAXPAYER ADVOCATE**

37. Clarify That the National Taxpayer Advocate May Hire Legal Counsel to  
Enable Her to Advocate More Effectively For Taxpayers . . . . . 88
38. Clarify the Authority of the National Taxpayer Advocate to Make Personnel  
Decisions to Protect the Independence of the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate. . . . . 91
39. Clarify the Taxpayer Advocate Service's Access to Files, Meetings, and  
Other Information . . . . . 93
40. Authorize the National Taxpayer Advocate to File *Amicus* Briefs . . . . . 95
41. Authorize the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate to Assist Certain Taxpayers  
Experiencing Economic Hardships During a Lapse in Appropriations . . . . . 97
42. Repeal Statute Suspension Under IRC § 7811(d) for Taxpayers Seeking  
Assistance From the Taxpayer Advocate Service . . . . . 100

**STRENGTHEN TAXPAYER RIGHTS IN JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS**

43. Expand the U.S. Tax Court's Jurisdiction to Hear Refund Cases . . . . . 102
44. Authorize the U.S. Tax Court to Order Refunds or Credits in Collection Due  
Process Proceedings Where Liability Is at Issue . . . . . 104
45. Promote Consistency With the Supreme Court's *Boechler* Decision by  
Making the Time Limits for Bringing All Tax Litigation Subject to Equitable  
Judicial Doctrines. . . . . 106
46. Extend the Deadline for Taxpayers to File a Refund Suit When They  
Request Appeals Reconsideration of a Notice of Claim Disallowance But  
the IRS Has Not Timely Decided Their Claim . . . . . 110
47. Authorize the Tax Court to Sign Subpoenas for the Production of Records  
Held by a Third Party Prior to a Scheduled Hearing . . . . . 112
48. Provide That the Scope of Judicial Review of Innocent Spouse  
Determinations Under IRC § 6015 Is *De Novo* . . . . . 114
49. Clarify That Taxpayers May Raise Innocent Spouse Relief as a Defense in  
Collection, Bankruptcy, and Refund Cases . . . . . 117
50. Fix the Donut Hole in the Tax Court's Jurisdiction to Determine  
Overpayments by Non-Filers With Filing Extensions . . . . . 119

**MISCELLANEOUS RECOMMENDATIONS**

51. Restructure the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to Make It Simpler for Taxpayers and Reduce Improper Payments.....	122
52. Adopt a Consistent and More Modern Definition of “Qualifying Child” Throughout the Internal Revenue Code .....	126
53. Permanently Give Taxpayers Affected by Federally Declared Disasters the Option of Using Prior Year Earned Income to Claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) .....	129
54. Allow the Limitation on Theft Loss Deductions in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act to Expire So Scam Victims Are Not Taxed on Amounts Stolen From Them.....	131
55. Amend the Lookback Period for Allowing Tax Credits or Refunds to Include the Period of Any Postponement or Additional or Disregarded Time for Timely Filing a Tax Return .....	133
56. Protect Taxpayers in Federally Declared Disaster Areas Who Receive Filing and Payment Relief From Inaccurate and Confusing Collection Notices.....	136
57. Allow Taxpayers in Limited Circumstances to Claim the Child Tax Credit With Respect to Children Who Do Not Have Social Security Numbers But Otherwise Qualify for the Credit .....	139
58. Clarify Whether Dependents Are Required to Have Taxpayer Identification Numbers for Purposes of the Credit for Other Dependents .....	141
59. Allow Members of Certain Religious Sects That Do Not Participate in Social Security and Medicare to Obtain Employment Tax Refunds .....	143
60. Remove the Requirement That Written Receipts Acknowledging Charitable Contributions Must Be “Contemporaneous” .....	145
61. Establish a Uniform Standard Mileage Deduction Rate for All Purposes.....	147
62. Eliminate the Marriage Penalty for Nonresident Aliens Who Otherwise Qualify for the Premium Tax Credit .....	149
63. Encourage and Authorize Independent Contractors and Service Recipients to Enter Into Voluntary Withholding Agreements .....	150
64. Require the IRS to Specify the Information Needed in Third-Party Contact Notices ....	152
65. Enable the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Program to Assist More Taxpayers in Controversies With the IRS .....	155
66. Compensate Taxpayers for “No-Change” National Research Program Audits.....	158
67. Improve Tax and Financial Literacy by Promoting Interagency Collaboration and Modernizing the Requirement That the IRS Publish Graphics Summarizing Government Revenue and Spending.....	160
68. Establish the Position of IRS Historian Within the Internal Revenue Service to Record and Publish Its History.....	163
69. Postpone Tax Deadlines for Hostages and Individuals Wrongly Detained Abroad .....	165

<b>APPENDIX 1: ADDITIONAL REFERENCE MATERIALS FOR LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS VOLUME .....</b>	<b>166</b>
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<b>APPENDIX 2: PRIOR NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS ENACTED INTO LAW .....</b>	<b>178</b>
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## NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE 2025 PURPLE BOOK: COMPILATION OF LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN TAXPAYER RIGHTS AND IMPROVE TAX ADMINISTRATION

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### INTRODUCTION

Section 7803(c)(2)(B)(ii)(IX) of the Internal Revenue Code requires the National Taxpayer Advocate, as part of her Annual Report to Congress, to propose legislative recommendations to resolve problems encountered by taxpayers. This year, we present 69 legislative recommendations.

We have taken the following steps to make these recommendations as accessible and user-friendly as possible for Members of Congress and their staffs:

- We have grouped our recommendations into categories that generally reflect the various stages in the tax administration process so that, for example, return filing issues are presented separately from audit and collection issues.
- We have presented each legislative recommendation in a format like the one used for congressional committee reports, with “Present Law,” “Reasons for Change,” and “Recommendation(s)” sections. In addition, we begin each recommendation with a concise summary that describes the “Problem” and our suggested “Solution” in layman’s terms to the extent possible. Our objective is to allow readers to quickly get a feel for all our recommendations by scanning the summaries.
- Where bills have been introduced in the past that are generally consistent with one of our recommendations, we have included a footnote at the end of the recommendation that identifies one or more of those bills. (Because of the large number of bills introduced in each Congress, we may have overlooked some. We apologize for any bills we have inadvertently omitted.)
- We have compiled a table, which appears at the end of this volume as Appendix 1, that identifies additional materials relating to our recommendations, where such materials exist. In addition to identifying a larger number of prior bills than we cite in our footnotes, the table provides references to more detailed discussions of the issues that have been published in prior National Taxpayer Advocate reports.

By our count, Congress has enacted approximately 51 legislative recommendations that the National Taxpayer Advocate has proposed. See Appendix 2 for a complete listing. This total includes approximately 23 provisions that were enacted as part of the Taxpayer First Act.<sup>1</sup>

The Office of the Taxpayer Advocate is a non-partisan, independent organization within the IRS that assists taxpayers in resolving problems with the IRS and makes administrative and legislative recommendations to mitigate taxpayer problems and protect taxpayer rights. We have dubbed this the “Purple Book” because the color purple, as a mix of red and blue, has come to symbolize bipartisanship. Historically, tax administration legislation has attracted bipartisan support. In 2019, for example, the Taxpayer First Act was approved by both the House and the Senate on voice votes with no recorded opposition.

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<sup>1</sup> Taxpayer First Act, Pub. L. No. 116-25, 133 Stat. 981 (2019). We say Congress enacted “approximately” a certain number of National Taxpayer Advocate recommendations because in some cases, enacted provisions are substantially similar to what we recommended but are not identical. The statement that Congress enacted a National Taxpayer Advocate recommendation is not intended to imply that Congress acted solely because of the recommendation. Congress, of course, receives suggestions from a wide variety of stakeholders on an ongoing basis and makes decisions based on the totality of the feedback it receives.

The recommendations presented in this volume are common-sense, generally non-controversial reforms that will strengthen taxpayer rights and improve tax administration. We are happy to discuss these recommendations in more detail with Members of Congress and their staffs. We highlight the following ten legislative recommendations for particular attention:

- **Authorize the IRS to Establish Minimum Competency Standards for Federal Tax Return Preparers and Revoke the Identification Numbers of Sanctioned Preparers (Recommendation #4).** The IRS receives over 160 million individual income tax returns each year, and most are prepared by paid tax return preparers. While some tax return preparers must meet licensing requirements (*e.g.*, certified public accountants, attorneys, and enrolled agents), most tax return preparers are not credentialed. Numerous studies have found that non-credentialed preparers disproportionately prepare inaccurate returns, causing some taxpayers to overpay their taxes and other taxpayers to underpay their taxes, which subject them to penalties and interest charges. Non-credentialed preparers also drive much of the high improper payments rate attributable to wrongful Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) claims. In fiscal year (FY) 2023, 33.5 percent of EITC payments, amounting to \$21.9 billion, were estimated to be improper, and among tax returns claiming the EITC prepared by paid tax return preparers, 96 percent of the total dollar amount of EITC audit adjustments was attributable to returns prepared by non-credentialed preparers.

Federal and state laws generally require lawyers, doctors, securities dealers, financial planners, actuaries, appraisers, contractors, motor vehicle operators, and even barbers and beauticians to obtain licenses or certifications and, in most cases, to pass competency tests. The Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations have each previously recommended that Congress authorize the Treasury Department to establish minimum competency standards for federal tax return preparers. To protect taxpayers and the public fisc, we likewise recommend that Congress provide this authorization as well as authorization for the Treasury Department to revoke the Preparer Tax Identification Numbers (PTINs) of preparers who have been sanctioned for improper conduct.<sup>2</sup>

- **Expand the U.S. Tax Court's Jurisdiction to Hear Refund Cases (Recommendation #43).** Under current law, taxpayers seeking to challenge an IRS tax due adjustment can file a petition in the U.S. Tax Court, while taxpayers who have paid their tax and are seeking a refund must file suit in a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. Litigating in a U.S. district court or the Court of Federal Claims is generally more challenging – filing fees are relatively high, rules of civil procedure are complex, the judges generally do not have tax expertise, and proceeding without a lawyer is difficult. By contrast, taxpayers litigating their cases in the Tax Court face a low \$60 filing fee, may follow less formal procedural rules, are generally assured their positions will be fairly considered even if they don't present them well because of the tax expertise of the Tax Court's judges, and can more easily represent themselves without a lawyer. For these reasons, the requirement that refund claims be litigated in a U.S. district court or the Court of Federal Claims effectively deprives many taxpayers of the right to judicial review of an IRS refund disallowance. In FY 2024, about 97 percent of all tax-related litigation was docketed in the Tax Court.<sup>3</sup> We recommend Congress expand the jurisdiction of the Tax Court to give taxpayers the option to litigate all tax disputes, including refund claims, in that forum.

2 In general, a PTIN must be obtained by a tax return preparer who is compensated for preparing or assisting in the preparation of all or substantially all of a federal tax return or claim for refund. The preparer must then include the PTIN on any returns or claims for refund prepared.

3 Data compiled by the IRS Office of Chief Counsel (Nov. 11, 2024). IRS, Counsel Automated Tracking System, TL-711 and TL-712. This data does not include cases on appeal and declaratory judgments.

- **Enable the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Program to Assist More Taxpayers in Controversies With the IRS (Recommendation #65).** The Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) program assists low-income taxpayers and taxpayers who speak English as a second language. When the LITC program was established as part of the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998, the law limited annual grants to no more than \$100,000 per clinic. The law also imposed a 100 percent “match” requirement so a clinic cannot receive more in grants than it raises from other sources. The nature and scope of the LITC Program have evolved considerably since 1998, and those requirements are preventing the program from expanding assistance to a larger universe of eligible taxpayers. We recommend Congress remove the per-clinic cap and allow the IRS to reduce the match requirement to 25 percent, where doing so would expand coverage to additional taxpayers.
- **Require the IRS to Timely Process Claims for Refund or Credit (Recommendation #2).** Millions of taxpayers file refund claims with the IRS each year. Under current law, there is no requirement that the IRS pay or deny them. It may simply ignore them. The taxpayers’ remedy is to file suit in a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. For many taxpayers, that is not a realistic or affordable option. The absence of a processing requirement is a poster child for non-responsive government. While the IRS generally does process refund claims, the claims can and sometimes do spend months or even years in administrative limbo within the IRS. We recommend Congress require the IRS to act on claims for credit or refund within one year and impose certain consequences on the IRS for failing to do so.
- **Allow the Limitation on Theft Loss Deductions in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act to Expire So Scam Victims Are Not Taxed on Amounts Stolen From Them (Recommendation #54).** Many financial scams involve the theft of retirement assets. In a typical scam, a con artist may pose as a law enforcement officer, convince a victim that their retirement savings are at risk, and persuade the victim to transfer their retirement savings to an account that the scammer controls. Then, the scammer absconds with the funds. Under the tax code, the victim’s withdrawal of funds from a retirement account is treated as a distribution subject to income tax, and if the victim is under age 59½, to a ten percent additional tax as well. Thus, the victim may not only lose their life savings but also owe significant tax on the stolen funds. Prior to 2018, scam victims generally could claim a theft loss deduction to offset the stolen amounts included in gross income, but the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) eliminated this deduction. We recommend Congress allow this TCJA limitation to expire so the theft deduction is again available in these circumstances.
- **Extend the Reasonable Cause Defense for the Failure-to-File Penalty to Taxpayers Who Rely on Return Preparers to E-File Their Returns (Recommendation #31).** The tax law imposes a penalty of up to 25 percent of the tax due for failing to file a timely tax return, but the penalty is waived where a taxpayer can show the failure was due to “reasonable cause.” Most taxpayers pay tax return preparers to prepare and file their returns for them. In 1985, when all returns were filed on paper, the Supreme Court held that a taxpayer’s reliance on a preparer to file a tax return did not constitute “reasonable cause” to excuse the failure-to-file penalty if the return was not timely filed. In 2023, a U.S. Court of Appeals held that “reasonable cause” is also not a defense when a taxpayer relies on a preparer to file a tax return electronically.

For several reasons, it is often much more difficult for taxpayers to verify that a return preparer has e-filed a return than to verify that a return has been paper-filed. Unfortunately, many taxpayers are not familiar with the electronic filing process and do not have the tax knowledge to ask for the

right document or proof of filing. Penalizing taxpayers who engage preparers and do their best to comply with their tax obligations is grossly unfair and undermines the congressional policy that the IRS encourage e-filing. Under the court's ruling, astute taxpayers would be well advised to ask their preparers to give them paper copies of their prepared returns and then transmit the returns by certified mail themselves so they can ensure compliance. We recommend Congress clarify that reliance on a preparer to e-file a tax return may constitute "reasonable cause" for penalty relief and direct the Secretary to issue regulations detailing what constitutes ordinary business care and prudence for purposes of evaluating reasonable cause requests.

- **Promote Consistency With the Supreme Court's *Boechler* Decision by Making the Time Limits for Bringing All Tax Litigation Subject to Equitable Judicial Doctrines (Recommendation #45).** Taxpayers who seek judicial review of adverse IRS determinations generally must file petitions in court by statutorily imposed deadlines. The courts have split over whether filing deadlines can be waived under extraordinary circumstances. Most tax litigation takes place in the U.S. Tax Court, where taxpayers are required to file petitions for review within 90 days of the date on a notice of deficiency (150 days if addressed to a person outside the United States). The Tax Court has held it lacks the legal authority to waive the 90-day (or 150-day) filing deadline even, to provide a stark example, if the taxpayer had a heart attack on Day 75 and remained in a coma until after the filing deadline. The Supreme Court recently held that filing deadlines are subject to "equitable tolling" in the context of Collection Due Process hearings. We recommend Congress harmonize the conflicting court rulings by providing that all filing deadlines to challenge the IRS in court are subject to equitable tolling where timely filing was impossible or impractical.
- **Remove the Requirement That Written Receipts Acknowledging Charitable Contributions Must Be "Contemporaneous" (Recommendation #60).** To claim a charitable contribution, a taxpayer must receive a written acknowledgement from the donee organization before filing a tax return. For example, if a taxpayer contributes \$5,000 to a church, synagogue, or mosque, files a tax return claiming the deduction on February 1, and receives a written acknowledgement on February 2, the deduction is not allowable – even if the taxpayer has credit card receipts and other documentation that unambiguously substantiate the deduction. This requirement can harm civic-minded taxpayers who do not realize how strict the timing requirements are and undermines congressional policy to encourage charitable giving. We recommend Congress modify the substantiation rules to require a reliable – but not necessarily advance – written acknowledgement from the donee organization.
- **Require That Math Error Notices Describe the Reason(s) for the Adjustment With Specificity, Inform Taxpayers They May Request Abatement Within 60 Days, and Be Mailed by Certified or Registered Mail (Recommendation #9).** When the IRS proposes to assess additional tax, it ordinarily must issue a notice of deficiency to the taxpayer, which gives the taxpayer an opportunity to seek judicial review in the U.S. Tax Court if the taxpayer disagrees with the IRS's position. In cases where a taxpayer commits a "mathematical or clerical error," however, the IRS may bypass deficiency procedures and issue a "math error" notice that summarily assesses additional tax. If a taxpayer does not respond to a math error notice within 60 days, the assessment becomes final, and the taxpayer will have forfeited the right to challenge the IRS's position in the Tax Court. Currently, math error notices often do not clearly explain the reason for the adjustment and do not prominently explain the consequences of failing to respond within 60 days. We recommend Congress require the IRS to describe the error giving rise to the adjustment with specificity and inform taxpayers they have 60 days

(or 120 days if the notice is addressed to a person outside the United States) to request that a summary assessment be abated or will forfeit their right to judicial review.<sup>4</sup>

- **Provide That Assessable Penalties Are Subject to Deficiency Procedures (Recommendation #14).**

The IRS ordinarily must issue a notice of deficiency giving taxpayers the right to appeal an adverse IRS determination in the U.S. Tax Court before it may assess tax.<sup>5</sup> In limited situations, however, the IRS may assess penalties without first issuing a notice of deficiency. These penalties are generally subject to judicial review only if a taxpayer first pays the penalties and then sues for a refund. Assessable penalties can be substantial, sometimes running into the millions of dollars. Under current IRS interpretation, these penalties include but are not limited to international information reporting penalties under IRC §§ 6038, 6038A, 6038B, 6038C, and 6038D. The inability of taxpayers to obtain judicial review on a preassessment basis and the requirement that taxpayers pay the penalties in full to obtain judicial review on a post-assessment basis can effectively deprive taxpayers of the right to judicial review at all. To ensure taxpayers have an opportunity to obtain judicial review before they are required to pay often substantial penalties they do not believe they owe, we recommend Congress require the IRS to issue a notice of deficiency before imposing assessable penalties.

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4 A taxpayer is given 60 additional days to respond to a notice of deficiency when the notice “is addressed to a person outside the United States.” IRC § 6213(a). By contrast, a taxpayer abroad is given no additional time to respond to a math error notice. To protect taxpayer rights and promote consistency, we recommend providing 60 additional days for taxpayers located outside the United States to respond to a math error notice. See *Give Taxpayers Abroad Additional Time to Request Abatement of a Math Error Assessment*, *infra*.

5 In the case of “mathematical or clerical errors,” the IRS may issue a “math error” notice that assesses tax without providing the right to judicial review. The taxpayer has 60 days to request that the math error assessment be abated. If the taxpayer makes the request, the IRS is required to abate the assessment, and if the IRS decides to challenge the taxpayer’s position, it must then issue a notice of deficiency. See IRC § 6213(b).

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## STRENGTHEN TAXPAYER RIGHTS

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### Legislative Recommendation #1

## Elevate the Importance of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights by Redesignating It as Section 1 of the Internal Revenue Code

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* The IRS is arguably the federal agency that Americans fear the most. Without a court order, it can garnish a taxpayer's wages, levy against a taxpayer's bank account, and file a Notice of Federal Tax Lien against a taxpayer's property to collect an IRS-determined tax debt. Taxpayers fear the IRS may take these actions erroneously or without regard to taxpayer rights.
- *Solution:* Redesignate the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TBOR) as Section 1 of the IRC. While partly symbolic, this change would send an important message to U.S. taxpayers and IRS employees alike that Congress expects IRS employees to respect taxpayer rights and considers them foundational for effective tax administration.

### PRESENT LAW

IRC § 7803(a)(3) requires the Commissioner to “ensure that employees of the Internal Revenue Service are familiar with and act in accord with taxpayer rights as afforded by other provisions of this title [the Internal Revenue Code], including –

- (A) *the right to be informed,*
- (B) *the right to quality service,*
- (C) *the right to pay no more than the correct amount of tax,*
- (D) *the right to challenge the position of the Internal Revenue Service and be heard,*
- (E) *the right to appeal a decision of the Internal Revenue Service in an independent forum,*
- (F) *the right to finality,*
- (G) *the right to privacy,*
- (H) *the right to confidentiality,*
- (I) *the right to retain representation, and*
- (J) *the right to a fair and just tax system.”*

### REASONS FOR CHANGE

Taxpayer rights are the foundation for effective tax administration. The U.S. tax system is frequently characterized as a system of “voluntary compliance.” While taxpayers ultimately may face penalties for noncompliance, our system relies in the first instance on the willingness of taxpayers to file returns on which they self-report their incomes (some of which is not reported to the IRS by third parties and is therefore difficult for the IRS to detect in the absence of self-reporting) and to pay the required tax.

In recent years, more than 160 million individuals and more than 12 million business entities have filed income tax returns annually, and they are entitled to be treated with respect. Making clear that taxpayers possess rights is not only the right thing to do, but TAS research suggests that when taxpayers have confidence the tax system is fair, they are more likely to comply voluntarily, which may translate into enhanced revenue collection as well.<sup>1</sup>

When we first proposed codifying the TBOR in 2007, we did not recommend a specific location for it in the IRC.<sup>2</sup> In codifying the TBOR, Congress placed the language in IRC § 7803(a), which deals with the appointment and duties of the Commissioner.

The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends the ten rights that make up the TBOR and are codified in IRC § 7803(a)(3) be relocated and recodified as Section 1 of the IRC. Doing so would make a strong and important statement about the value Congress places on taxpayer rights and its expectation that IRS employees respect and act in accordance with those rights.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Move § 1 of the IRC to place it before Subtitle A and amend it to read as follows:<sup>3</sup>

### SECTION 1. TAXPAYER BILL OF RIGHTS.

#### (a) Taxpayer Rights.

- (1) In discharging their duties and responsibilities, every officer and employee of the Internal Revenue Service shall act in accordance with taxpayer rights as afforded by other provisions of this title, including –
  - (a) the right to be informed,
  - (b) the right to quality service,
  - (c) the right to pay no more than the correct amount of tax,
  - (d) the right to challenge the position of the Internal Revenue Service and be heard,
  - (e) the right to appeal a decision of the Internal Revenue Service in an independent forum,
  - (f) the right to finality,
  - (g) the right to privacy,
  - (h) the right to confidentiality,
  - (i) the right to retain representation, and
  - (j) the right to a fair and just tax system.<sup>4</sup>

1 See National Taxpayer Advocate 2013 Annual Report to Congress vol. 2, at 33 (Research Study: *Small Business Compliance: Further Analysis of Influential Factors*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2013-ARC\\_VOL-2-3.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2013-ARC_VOL-2-3.pdf); National Taxpayer Advocate 2012 Annual Report to Congress vol. 2, at 1 (Research Study: *Factors Influencing Voluntary Compliance by Small Businesses: Preliminary Survey Results*), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Research-Studies-Factors-Influencing-Voluntary-Compliance-by-Small-Businesses-Preliminary-Survey-Results.pdf>.

2 See National Taxpayer Advocate 2007 Annual Report to Congress 478 (Legislative Recommendation: *Taxpayer Bill of Rights and De Minimis "Apology" Payments*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/arc\\_2007\\_vol\\_1\\_legislativerec.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/arc_2007_vol_1_legislativerec.pdf).

3 This change would require conforming IRC changes. IRC § 7803(a)(3) could be deleted, and existing IRC § 1 would have to be renumbered. To avoid the need to renumber subsequent code sections, Section 1 could be remembered as Section 1A.

4 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, although with certain wording differences, see System Transparency and Accountability for the IRS Act, H.R. 7341, 117th Cong. § 2 (2022). The provisions of the TBOR were codified at IRC § 7803(a)(3). See Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Pub. L. No. 114-113, Div. Q, § 401(a), 129 Stat. 2242, 3117 (2015). We are proposing to relocate the existing language in IRC § 7803(a)(3) virtually without change. We are recommending a minor refinement to the lead-in language that we think makes it read more clearly and does not substantially change the meaning. However, if the staffs of the tax writing committees believe our refinement does substantially change the meaning, the text of IRC § 7803(a)(3) could be redesignated as IRC § 1 with no change in language at all.

## Legislative Recommendation #2

# Require the IRS to Timely Process Claims for Credit or Refund

## SUMMARY

- *Problem:* When taxpayers file claims for credit or refund, they expect the IRS to promptly process their claims, but surprisingly, there is no legal requirement that the IRS process refund claims. Taxpayers often experience extended processing delays and sometimes are left with no recourse but to file a refund suit in court to recover their tax overpayments.
- *Solution:* Mandate that the IRS process taxpayer claims for credit or refund within 12 months of filing. Further mandate that if the IRS fails to take timely action, it must pay additional interest to taxpayers.

## PRESENT LAW

IRC § 6402 authorizes the IRS to issue a credit or refund when a taxpayer has made an overpayment of tax. Pursuant to IRC § 6501, taxpayers generally may file a claim for credit or refund within the later of three years from the date they filed the return or two years from the date they paid the tax. After receiving a valid claim, the IRS generally has 45 days to issue a credit or refund before it must pay interest.<sup>1</sup>

IRC § 6621 sets forth the applicable interest rates. IRC § 6621(a) provides that the interest rate for overpayments and underpayments of tax is generally the federal short-term rate, plus three percentage points.<sup>2</sup> IRC § 6621(c)(1) provides that for large corporate underpayments, the interest rate under IRC § 6621(a) is applied by substituting “5 percentage points” for “3 percentage points.” This additional two percentage point interest charge for large corporate underpayments is often referred to as “hot interest.”

Pursuant to IRC § 6532(a)(1), a taxpayer may file a lawsuit seeking a refund in a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims if the IRS has not acted on an administrative refund claim within six months from the date the taxpayer filed the claim or, if sooner, from the date the IRS disallowed the claim.

Although the tax code prescribes deadlines by which taxpayers must file claims for credit or refund, it does not prescribe reciprocal deadlines requiring the IRS to act on those claims.

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

Taxpayers filing claims for credit or refund with the IRS are seeking money to which they believe they are entitled. In the case of refunds, taxpayers may need timely access to the funds to pay for basic living expenses or finance essential business operations. Taxpayers want and have a right to expect quick review and processing of their claims.

Surprisingly, the tax code does not require the IRS to process claims for credit or refund or even to respond to taxpayers. The IRS can simply ignore refund claims. This odd result is a poster child for non-responsive government. It fails to meet the basic expectations expressed in the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, including the *rights to be informed, to quality service, to pay no more than the correct amount of tax, and to finality*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> IRC § 6611.

<sup>2</sup> In the case of a corporate taxpayer, the overpayment rate is two percent. IRC § 6621(a)(1)(B).

<sup>3</sup> See Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TBOR), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/taxpayer-rights> (last visited Nov. 1, 2024). The rights contained in TBOR are also codified in IRC § 7803(a)(3).

While the IRS generally does process claims for credit or refund, claims can and sometimes do spend months or even years in administrative limbo. Other than having to pay interest, no legal or economic incentive exists for the IRS to expeditiously review and process the claims.

If the IRS has taken no action on a refund claim within six months from the date of filing, the taxpayer may file a lawsuit for recovery in a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. When that occurs, the courts and the IRS expend judicial resources before the IRS's Examination function or the IRS Independent Office of Appeals (Appeals) has had an opportunity to evaluate the claim. Moreover, litigation is time-consuming, complex, and costly for taxpayers and the government alike.

By authorizing taxpayers to sue the government for a refund six months after filing an administrative refund claim, Congress has implicitly demonstrated its expectation that six months is enough time for the IRS to process a claim. But the IRS will only realize this expectation if Congress creates requirements and incentives to bring about timely action. Recognizing that the agency may lack the resources to process all refund claims within six months, particularly in complex cases, the National Taxpayer Advocate believes the agency should receive a "grace period" of an additional six months before consequences kick in. Though the IRS should process refund claims as quickly as possible, it should have 12 months from the filing of a claim to take one of three permissible actions:

- Allow the claim (in whole or in part);
- Disallow the claim (in whole or in part); or
- Initiate an audit of the tax year for which the taxpayer made the claim.

If the IRS fails to perform one of the above actions within 12 months, the tax code should require it to pay the taxpayer an additional two percentage points of interest – the "hot interest" premium described in IRC § 6621(c)(1) – on the portion of the claim ultimately allowed.

The combination of an explicit statutory requirement to process refund claims within a 12-month period and corresponding consequences for failing to do so would protect taxpayer rights, including the *rights to be informed, to quality service, to pay no more than the correct amount of tax, and to finality*.<sup>4</sup> If the IRS is doing its job properly, it would not face these consequences.<sup>5</sup>

The statute should also provide the IRS with the authority to rescind a Notice of Claim Disallowance with the written consent of the taxpayer.<sup>6</sup> This will benefit taxpayers who have filed a claim for credit or refund and erroneously received a Notice of Claim Disallowance. The IRS can also use such rescission to correct administrative errors, such as notices issued to the wrong taxpayer, for the wrong tax period, and for an incorrect amount.<sup>7</sup>

4 See TBOR, <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/taxpayer-rights> (last visited Nov. 1, 2024). The rights contained in TBOR are also codified in IRC § 7803(a)(3).

5 If this proposal is enacted and the IRS fails to prioritize the processing of refund claims, there is a risk it will simply disallow all refund claims at the 12-month mark to comply with the processing requirement and avoid paying extra interest. That would not be an acceptable result. In enacting the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998, the conference committee, adopting language from the Senate Finance Committee report, stated in the context of penalties: "[I]n any court proceeding, the Secretary must initially come forward with evidence that it is appropriate to apply a particular penalty to the taxpayer before the court can impose the penalty." H.R. REP. NO. 105-599, at 241 (1998) (Conf. Rep.); see IRC § 7491(c). Along similar lines, and without shifting the burden of proof, Congress should consider requiring that the IRS have a basis for denying a refund claim.

6 See, e.g., IRC § 6212(d) (rescission of a statutory notice of deficiency).

7 Congress has provided rescission authority in the deficiency context, allowing the IRS to rescind a statutory notice of deficiency upon the mutual agreement of the IRS and the taxpayer. See IRC § 6212(d).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend IRC § 6402 to require the IRS to act on timely claims for credit or refund within 12 months by allowing the claim (in whole or in part), disallowing the claim (in whole or in part), or initiating an audit of the tax year for which the taxpayer made the claim.
- Provide that if the IRS fails to act on a timely refund claim within 12 months, it must pay interest at the rate set forth in IRC § 6621(a)(1), plus two percentage points, on the amount of the claim ultimately allowed.
- Amend IRC § 6402 to give the IRS the authority to rescind a Notice of Claim Disallowance with the written consent of the taxpayer.

## IMPROVE THE FILING PROCESS

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### Legislative Recommendation #3

## Treat Electronically Submitted Tax Payments and Documents as Timely If Submitted on or Before the Applicable Deadline

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* If a taxpayer mails a payment or tax return to the IRS that is postmarked by midnight on the due date, the payment or tax return will be considered timely even if it is received a week later. If the taxpayer submits the same payment or return to the IRS electronically on the due date, however, it may be considered late if the IRS receives and processes it the next day. This dichotomy can harm taxpayers who make timely electronic submissions, and it favors paper transmission over electronic transmission – exactly the opposite incentive the rules should provide.
- *Solution:* Provide that a payment or document submitted by midnight on the due date will be considered timely even if the IRS does not receive and process it that day.

### PRESENT LAW

IRC § 7502(a)(1) provides that if certain requirements are satisfied, a mailed document or payment is deemed filed or paid on the date of the postmark stamped on the envelope. Therefore, if the postmark shows a document or payment was mailed by the due date, it will be considered timely, even if it is received after the due date.

IRC § 7502(b) and (c) provide only that this timely-mailed/timely-filed rule (commonly known as the “mailbox rule”) applies to documents and payments sent by U.S. postal mail, designated private delivery services, and electronic filing through an electronic return transmitter. It does not apply to all filings and payments. With respect to electronic filing, the Secretary is authorized to issue regulations describing the extent to which the mailbox rule shall apply.<sup>1</sup> To date, the only regulations the Secretary has issued relating to electronic filing cover documents filed through an electronic return transmitter (*i.e.*, documents that are e-filed).<sup>2</sup>

### REASONS FOR CHANGE

The statutory mailbox rule in IRC § 7502 does not apply to the electronic transmission of payments to the IRS. In addition, the mailbox rule does not apply to the electronic filing of time-sensitive documents (except documents filed electronically through an electronic return transmitter), including those transmitted by fax, email, the digital communication portal, or upload via an online account.<sup>3</sup> If the IRS does not receive an electronically submitted document or payment until after the due date, the document or payment

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<sup>1</sup> IRC § 7502(c)(2). While this provision authorizes the Secretary to extend the mailbox rule for electronic filing, it does not authorize the Secretary to extend the mailbox rule for electronic payments.

<sup>2</sup> Treas. Reg. § 301.7502-1(d).

<sup>3</sup> See Treas. Reg. § 301.7502-1(d)(3)(i) (containing a definition of an electronic return transmitter). See also Rev. Proc. 2007-40, 2007-1 C.B. 1488 (providing a list of documents that can be filed electronically with an electronic return transmitter).

is considered late, even if the taxpayer can produce confirmation that they transmitted the payment or document on or before the due date. This comparatively unfavorable treatment of electronically submitted documents and payments undermines the IRS's efforts to encourage greater use of digital services and imposes additional cost and burden on taxpayers and the IRS.

Along similar lines, the IRS encourages U.S. taxpayers to make payments electronically, often by using the Treasury Department's Electronic Federal Tax Payment System (EFTPS). However, the EFTPS website displays the following warning: "Payments using this Web site or our voice response system must be scheduled **by 8 p.m. ET the day before the due date** to be received timely by the IRS" (emphasis in original).<sup>4</sup> This limitation applies to all payments.

*Example:* Based on the bolded language on the EFTPS website, if a taxpayer owes a balance due on April 15 and mails the payment to the IRS before midnight on April 15, the payment will be considered timely, even if it takes a week or longer for the IRS to receive, open, and process the check. If the same taxpayer submits the payment using EFTPS, the payment will be considered late if submitted after 8 p.m. on April 14 (28 hours earlier), even though the payment generally would be debited from the taxpayer's account on April 16 – often a week sooner than if submitted by postal mail.

This disparity in the treatment of mailed and electronically submitted payments makes little sense. As compared with a mailed check, an electronic payment is received more quickly, is cheaper to process, and eliminates the risk that a mailed check will be lost or misplaced. Yet, rather than encouraging taxpayers to use EFTPS, an earlier deadline serves as a deterrent.

Despite the bolded warning on the main EFTPS website, the related FAQs describe circumstances in which the IRS will credit both business and individual tax payments on the date the payment is made.<sup>5</sup> For example, the FAQs state that business tax payments of \$1 million or less made before 3 p.m. Eastern Time (ET) on the due date will be considered timely. While 3 p.m. ET on the due date is certainly better than 8 p.m. ET the day before the due date, the parameters detailed in the FAQs do not go far enough. In addition, it is unclear why the Treasury Department has chosen to bury the more flexible time periods in the FAQs. Given these limitations and the temporary nature of FAQs and website information, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommends that Congress amend the mailbox rule in IRC § 7502 to add permanence and common sense, so taxpayers can rely on the timeliness of electronically submitted payments.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 7502 to apply the statutory mailbox rule to all time-sensitive documents and payments electronically submitted to the IRS in a manner comparable to similar documents and payments submitted through the U.S. Postal Service or a designated delivery service and direct the Secretary to issue regulations implementing this requirement.<sup>6</sup>

4 See U.S. Dep't of the Treasury, Electronic Federal Tax Payment System (EFTPS), <https://www.eftps.gov/eftps> (last visited Sept. 19, 2024).

5 EFTPS, *Frequently Asked Questions, What if I have to make a payment that is due today?*, <https://www.eftps.gov/eftps/direct/FAQGeneral.page> (last visited Sept. 19, 2024).

6 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Tax Administration Simplification Act, S. 5316, 118th Cong. § 4 (2024), and H.R. 8864, 118th Cong. § 2 (2024).

**Legislative Recommendation #4****Authorize the IRS to Establish Minimum Competency Standards for Federal Tax Return Preparers and Revoke the Identification Numbers of Sanctioned Preparers****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The majority of paid tax return preparers are non-credentialed. Some have no training or experience. Taxpayers are harmed when incompetent tax return preparers make errors that cause them to pay too much tax, fail to claim tax benefits for which they are eligible, or subject them to IRS tax adjustments and penalties for understating their tax. The public Treasury is harmed when incompetent or unethical preparers claim tax benefits for which taxpayers are not eligible, leading to billions of dollars in improper payments.
- *Solution:* Require paid non-credentialed tax return preparers to pass a basic competency test, meet specified standards of conduct, and take annual continuing education courses about federal tax laws and procedures, and authorize the IRS to revoke the identification numbers of sanctioned tax return preparers.

**PRESENT LAW**

Federal law imposes no competency or licensing requirements on paid tax return preparers.

Credentialed individuals who may prepare tax returns, including attorneys, certified public accountants (CPAs), and enrolled agents (EAs), are generally required to pass competency tests and take continuing education courses (including an ethics component). Volunteers who prepare tax returns as part of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Tax Counseling for the Elderly programs also must pass competency tests.

However, the vast majority of paid preparers are non-credentialed and are not required to pass competency tests, take any courses in tax return preparation, or follow prescribed standards of conduct.

IRC § 6109(a)(4) requires all tax return preparers, regardless of credential, to include an identifying number on tax returns they prepare. Treasury Regulation § 1.6109-2 requires preparers to apply for a Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN) from the IRS and include it on prepared returns.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

In recent years, the IRS has received over 160 million individual income tax returns annually. Paid tax return preparers prepare the majority of these returns. Both taxpayers and the tax system depend heavily on the ability of preparers to prepare accurate returns. Yet numerous studies have found that non-credentialed tax return preparers routinely prepare inaccurate returns, which harms taxpayers and the public fisc.

To protect the public, federal and state laws generally require lawyers, CPAs, doctors, securities dealers, financial planners, actuaries, appraisers, contractors, motor vehicle operators, and even barbers and beauticians to obtain licenses or certifications and, in most cases, to pass competency tests. Taxpayers and the tax system would benefit from requiring tax return preparers to pass minimum competency tests.

The relationship between preparer credentials and overclaims in the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program provides a stark illustration of the need to strengthen preparer standards. The EITC is one of the federal government's largest means-tested anti-poverty programs. It enjoys broad bipartisan support, but it also is plagued by a high improper payments rate. In fiscal year 2023, the IRS estimates the amount of improper payments was \$21.9 billion, or 33.5 percent of dollars paid out.<sup>1</sup> IRS data suggests that a significant portion of improper payments was attributable to tax returns prepared by non-credentialed preparers. Among returns claiming the EITC prepared by paid tax return preparers in tax year 2022, non-credentialed preparers prepared 82 percent, and the returns they prepared accounted for 96 percent of the total dollar amount of EITC audit adjustments made on prepared returns.<sup>2</sup> Requiring that tax return preparers demonstrate competence and obtain continuing education is arguably the simplest and most effective step Congress can take to improve return accuracy and reduce improper payments.

Previous studies conducted by the Government Accountability Office, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), and others illustrate the extent – and adverse consequences – of inaccurate return preparation by unenrolled tax return preparers.<sup>3</sup>

In 2009, the IRS Commissioner decided to implement minimum standards for paid return preparers. Section 330 of Title 31 of the U.S. Code authorizes the Treasury Department to regulate “practice” before the IRS, and the Commissioner took the position that tax return preparation falls within the definition of “practice.” On that basis, the IRS initiated extensive hearings and discussions with stakeholder groups to receive comments and develop a program under which all parties believed they could operate.<sup>4</sup> The IRS, together with the Treasury Department, implemented the program in 2011. However, a federal court later rejected the IRS's position that it had the legal authority to regulate tax return preparation, holding that “mere” tax return preparation did not constitute “practice” before the IRS.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the program was terminated.

In response, the IRS created a voluntary “Annual Filing Season Program.” Non-credentialed preparers who participate must meet specific requirements, including taking 18 hours of continuing education each year, which includes an examined tax refresher course. If they meet the requirements, the IRS provides them with a “Record of Completion” they presumably can use in their marketing to attract potential clients.<sup>6</sup> However, this program is less rigorous than the one the IRS implemented in 2011, and most non-credentialed preparers do not participate. This voluntary program does not satisfy the objectives of a comprehensive regime.

Since the 2011 program was invalidated, the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations have each previously asked Congress to pass legislation giving the Treasury Department the legal authority to establish and enforce minimum standards. Excerpts from their proposals include the following:

The Obama administration: “Incompetent and dishonest tax return preparers increase collection costs, reduce revenues, disadvantage taxpayers by potentially subjecting them to penalties and interest as a result of incorrect

1 Government Accountability Office (GAO), GAO-24-106927, *Improper Payments: Information on Agencies' Fiscal Year 2023 Estimates* 3, 5 (2024), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-106927>.

2 IRS, Compliance Data Warehouse, Individual Returns Transaction File, Return Preparers and Providers PTIN Database and Audit Information Management System – Closed Cases Database (Jan. 25, 2024).

3 See GAO, GAO-14-467T, *Paid Tax Return Preparers: In a Limited Study, Preparers Made Significant Errors* (2014), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-14-467t>; GAO, GAO-06-563T, *Paid Tax Return Preparers: In a Limited Study, Chain Preparers Made Serious Errors* (2006), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-06-563t>; TIGTA, Ref. No. 2008-40-171, *Most Tax Returns Prepared by a Limited Sample of Unenrolled Preparers Contained Significant Errors* (2008); Jamie Woodward, Acting Comm'r, N.Y. Dep't of Tax'n and Fin., Remarks at the IRS Tax Return Preparer Review Public Forum (Sept. 2, 2009); see also Tom Herman, *New York Sting Nabs Tax Preparers*, WALL ST. J., Nov. 26, 2008, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122765734841458181>.

4 See IRS, Pub. 4832, Return Preparer Review (Dec. 2009), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p4832.pdf>.

5 *Loving v. IRS*, 917 F. Supp. 2d 67 (D.D.C. 2013), *aff'd*, 742 F.3d 1013 (D.C. Cir. 2014).

6 Rev. Proc. 2014-42, 2014-29 I.R.B. 192.

returns, and undermine confidence in the tax system. . . . [Our] proposal would explicitly provide that the Secretary has the authority to regulate all paid tax return preparers.”<sup>7</sup>

The Trump administration: “The Administration continues to hold that improved regulation of preparers is an effective means to improve voluntary compliance. Thus, the Administration requests that the IRS be granted the authority to require minimum standards for all 400,000 tax preparers without credentials.”<sup>8</sup>

The Biden administration: “The current lack of authority to provide oversight on paid tax return preparers results in greater non-compliance when taxpayers who use incompetent preparers or preparers who engage in unscrupulous conduct become subject to penalties, interest, or avoidable costs of litigation due to the poor-quality advice they receive. The lack of authority affects revenues to the IRS when the resulting noncompliance is not mitigated during return processing. Regulation of paid tax return preparers, in conjunction with diligent enforcement, will help promote high quality services from paid tax return preparers, will improve voluntary compliance, and will foster taxpayer confidence in the fairness of the tax system.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the longstanding reasons for establishing minimum preparer standards, Initiative 1.4 of the IRS Inflation Reduction Act Strategic Operating Plan provides a new reason.<sup>10</sup> The IRS is continuing to expand the capabilities of the online Tax Pro Account program to give preparers access to an increasing amount of confidential taxpayer information.<sup>11</sup> While there are considerable benefits to this plan, there are also significant security risks, including identity theft and other fraud. Allowing non-credentialed tax return preparers to access more confidential tax return information would increase these risks.

Some have argued that requiring preparers to pass a competency test and take annual continuing education courses would address competence but would not ensure preparers conduct themselves ethically. The National Taxpayer Advocate agrees that tax law competency and ethical conduct are distinct issues. However, we believe preparer standards would raise both competency and ethical conduct levels. A preparer who invests in learning enough about tax return preparation to pass a competency test and takes annual continuing education courses would demonstrate a commitment to return preparation as a profession. The preparer would be a vested partner in the tax system and would have more to lose if found to have engaged in misconduct, just like attorneys, CPAs, EAs, and other credentialed preparers. In addition, if tax return preparation is characterized as “practice” before the IRS under 31 U.S.C. § 330, the Office of Professional Responsibility would have oversight authority over preparers and could impose sanctions in cases of unethical conduct.<sup>12</sup>

One related issue requires attention. Under current law, every preparer must obtain a PTIN from the IRS to prepare tax returns, but the IRS does not have the authority to revoke the PTINs of preparers who engage in improper or illegal conduct. By contrast, the IRS may refuse to issue or revoke the electronic filer identification numbers (EFINs) of preparers who fail to pass suitability checks, fail subsequent reviews, or are prohibited by

7 Dep’t of the Treasury, General Explanations of the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2015 Revenue Proposals 244 (Mar. 2014), <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/131/General-Explanations-FY2015.pdf>.

8 Dep’t of the Treasury, FY 2019 Budget in Brief 7, <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/266/16.-IRS-FY-2019-BIB-FY2019.pdf>.

9 Dep’t of the Treasury, General Explanations of the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2025 Revenue Proposals 206 (Mar. 2024), <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/131/General-Explanations-FY2025.pdf>.

10 IRS, Pub. 3744, IRS Inflation Reduction Act Strategic Operating Plan 26 (Apr. 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p3744.pdf>.

11 IRS, Pub. 3744-B, 2024 Inflation Reduction Act Strategic Operating Plan Annual Update 4 (Apr. 2024), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p3744b.pdf>; IRS, Pub. 3744-A, 2024 Inflation Reduction Act Strategic Operating Plan Annual Update Supplement 15 (Apr. 2024), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p3744a.pdf>.

12 For a general overview of the rules of practice before the IRS, see IRS, Pub. 947, Practice Before the IRS and Power of Attorney (Feb. 2018), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p947.pdf>.

federal court injunction or another federal or state action from participating in IRS e-file.<sup>13</sup> Congress should allow PTIN revocation under similar circumstances and with the proper due process protections.<sup>14</sup>

In sum, IRS data and other compliance studies have consistently found that tax returns prepared by non-credentialed preparers are often inaccurate. Minimum standards would directly improve preparer competency levels and are likely to raise ethical norms. In addition, giving the IRS the authority to revoke the PTINs of substantially noncompliant preparers would provide the IRS with another tool to encourage compliant behavior in the profession.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend 31 U.S.C. § 330 to authorize the Secretary to establish minimum standards for paid federal tax return preparers.<sup>15</sup>
- Amend IRC § 6109 to authorize the Secretary to revoke PTINs concurrently with the assessment of sanctions for violations of established minimum standards for paid federal tax return preparers.<sup>16</sup>

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13 IRS, Pub. 3112, IRS E-File Application & Participation (Oct. 2024), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p3112.pdf>; Rev. Proc. 2007-40, 2007-26 I.R.B. 1488.

14 See, e.g., *Zirin Tax Co. Inc. v. United States*, No. 24-cv-01511, 2024 WL 2882609 (E.D.N.Y. June 7, 2024) (discussing the Fifth Amendment due process concerns caused by the government suspending the plaintiff's EFIN).

15 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see, e.g., Tax Refund Protection Act, S. 1209 & H.R. 2702, 118th Cong. § 2 (2023).

16 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see, e.g., System Transparency and Accountability for the IRS Act, H.R. 7341, 117th Cong. § 3(e)(2) (2022).

**Legislative Recommendation #5****Extend the Time for Small Businesses to Make Subchapter S Elections****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Individuals who incorporate their sole proprietorship or small business often miss the deadline for electing to be treated as an “S” corporation because the election deadline generally precedes the filing deadline for the corporation’s first income tax return. Taxpayers routinely obtain permission to make late elections, but doing so imposes additional costs and burdens for the business and the IRS alike.
- *Solution:* Allow taxpayers to elect “S” status on their first timely filed corporation income tax return.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 1362(b)(1) provides that a small business corporation (S corporation) may elect to be treated as a passthrough entity by making an election at any time during the preceding taxable year or at any time on or before the 15th day of the third month of the current taxable year. The prescribed form for making this election is IRS Form 2553, Election by a Small Business Corporation.

IRC § 6072(b) provides that income tax returns of S corporations made on a calendar-year basis must be filed on or before March 15 following the close of the calendar year, and income tax returns of S corporations made on a fiscal year basis must be filed on or before the 15th day of the third month following the close of the fiscal year.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Many small business owners are not familiar with the rules governing S corporations, and they learn about the ramifications of S corporation status for the first time when they hire a tax professional to prepare their corporation’s income tax return for its first year of operation. By that time, the deadline for electing S corporation status has passed. Failure to make a timely S corporation election can cause significant adverse tax consequences for businesses, such as incurring taxation at the corporate level and rendering shareholders ineligible to deduct operating losses on their individual income tax returns.<sup>1</sup> For context, roughly 5.9 million S corporation returns were filed in fiscal year (FY) 2023, which accounted for about 70 percent of all corporate returns.<sup>2</sup>

Taxpayers may seek permission from the IRS to make a late S corporation election under Revenue Procedure 2013-30 or through a private letter ruling (PLR) request. Under the revenue procedure, a corporation that failed to timely file Form 2553 may request relief by filing Form 2553 within three years and 75 days of the date the election is intended to be effective. In addition, the corporation must attach a statement explaining its

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1 The value of an S corporation election increased for many taxpayers with the passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which generally allows individual taxpayers to deduct 20 percent of domestic qualified business income from a passthrough business, including an S corporation, effectively reducing the individual income tax rate on such income by 20 percent. The deduction is subject to limitations that apply above certain income thresholds (beginning at \$383,900 for joint filers and \$191,950 for single returns, for tax years beginning in 2024). See IRC § 199A; Pub. L. No. 115-97, § 11011, 131 Stat. 2054, 2063 (2017); H.R. REP. NO. 115-466, at 205-224 (2017) (Conf. Rep.); Rev. Proc. 2023-34, § 3.27, 2023-48 I.R.B. 1287, [https://www.irs.gov/irb/2023-48\\_IRB#REV-PROC-2023-34](https://www.irs.gov/irb/2023-48_IRB#REV-PROC-2023-34).

2 IRS, Pub. 55-B, IRS Data Book FY 2023 (Apr. 2024), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p55b.pdf> (Table 2, Number of Returns and Other Forms Filed, by Type, Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023).

“reasonable cause” for failing to timely file the election and the diligent actions it took to correct the mistake upon its discovery.

Finally, all shareholders must sign a statement affirming they have reported their income on all affected returns as if the S corporation election had been timely filed (*i.e.*, during the period between the date the S corporation election would have become effective if timely filed and the date the completed election form is filed). If an entity cannot comply with the revenue procedure, it may request relief through a PLR. In 2024, the IRS generally charged a user fee for a late-election relief PLR of \$12,600.<sup>3</sup>

The S corporation election deadline burdens small businesses by requiring them to pay tax professionals and often IRS user fees to request permission to make a late election. It burdens shareholders because when the IRS rejects an S corporation return due to the absence of a timely election, the status of the corporation is affected, and that may cause changes on the shareholders’ personal income tax returns. In addition, the deadline and relief procedures burden the IRS, which must allocate resources to process late-election requests.

Because small business owners often consider the S corporation election for the first time when they prepare their company’s first income tax return, the burdens described above would be substantially alleviated if corporations could make an S corporation election on their first timely filed income tax return.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 1362(b)(1) to allow a small business corporation to elect to be treated as an S corporation by checking a box on its first timely filed IRS Form 1120-S, U.S. Income Tax Return for an S Corporation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> User fees for PLRs are set forth in the first revenue procedure of each year. For 2024 user fees, see Rev. Proc. 2024-1, 2024-1 I.R.B. 1, App’x A, *Schedule of User Fees*. Treas. Reg. § 301.9100-3 prescribes the procedures and requirements for requesting late-election relief.

<sup>4</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Tax Administration Simplification Act, S. 5316, 118th Cong. § 2 (2024), and H.R. 8864, 118th Cong. § 3 (2024); Protecting Taxpayers Act, S. 3278, 115th Cong. § 304 (2018).

**Legislative Recommendation #6****Adjust Individual Estimated Tax Payment Deadlines to Occur Quarterly****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Estimated tax installment payments for individual taxpayers are often referred to as “quarterly payments,” but they are not due at even three-month intervals. Rather, they are spaced at three-month, two-month, three-month, and four-month intervals (April 15, June 15, September 15, and January 15). These uneven cutoff dates are confusing to taxpayers and can make it difficult for them to calculate their net income; few self-employed individuals and small businesses keep their books and records based on these dates.
- *Solution:* Revise the estimated tax payment deadlines so they fall at even quarterly intervals.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6654(c) generally requires individual taxpayers to make estimated tax payments in four installments due on April 15, June 15, September 15, and January 15. IRC § 6654(l) generally applies the same deadlines for estates and trusts.<sup>1</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Although estimated tax installment payments are often referred to as “quarterly payments,” the payment dates do not align with calendar year quarters and are not evenly spaced at three-month intervals. These dates are not intuitive and create compliance burdens. Small business owners and self-employed individuals are particularly affected by the estimated tax rules because their incomes generally are not subject to wage withholding and they are far more likely to keep their books based on regular three-month quarters than the seemingly random intervals prescribed by IRC § 6654.

These uneven intervals make it more difficult for taxpayers to calculate net income and save appropriately to make estimated tax payments, and thus may reduce compliance.<sup>2</sup> They also cause confusion, as taxpayers struggle to remember the due dates. This confusion affects both traditionally self-employed workers and workers in the gig economy. Setting due dates to fall 15 days after the end of each calendar quarter would be more logical and make it easier for taxpayers to remember and comply with the due dates.

1 IRC § 6654(j) generally requires non-resident aliens to make three estimated tax payments, which are due on June 15, September 15, and January 15. The June 15 date coincides with the due date for IRS Form 1040-NR, U.S. Nonresident Alien Income Tax Return, as provided in IRC § 6072(c). If this proposal is adopted, we recommend the second payment deadline be changed from September 15 to October 15 for consistency. IRC § 6655(c) generally requires corporate taxpayers to make estimated tax payments in four installments due on April 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15. Some of the benefits of establishing uniform quarterly deadlines would also apply to corporate taxpayers. However, we have not analyzed the implications of changing the corporate deadlines, so this recommendation is limited to the deadlines applicable to individual taxpayers.

2 Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, Ref. No. 2004-30-040, *While Progress Toward Earlier Intervention With Delinquent Taxpayers Has Been Made, Action Is Needed to Prevent Noncompliance With Estimated Tax Payment Requirements* 12 (2004).

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6654(c)(2) to set the estimated tax installment deadlines 15 days after the end of each calendar quarter (April 15, July 15, October 15, and January 15).<sup>3</sup>

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3 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see, *e.g.*, Tax Administration Simplification Act, S. 5316, 118th Cong. § 3 (2024), and H.R. 8864, 118th Cong. § 4 (2024); Tax Deadline Simplification Act, H.R. 3708, 118th Cong. § 2 (2023) and H.R. 4214, 117th Cong. § 2 (2021).

**Legislative Recommendation #7****Eliminate Duplicative Reporting Requirements Imposed by the Bank Secrecy Act and the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* U.S. taxpayers with foreign accounts and assets are subject to two sets of information reporting requirements – one for the IRS and one for the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN). Much of the information requested by these two Treasury Department bureaus is duplicative. Yet individuals must complete separate forms for each and are subject to significant penalties for failure to report accounts or assets on one or both forms, even when the individuals owe little or no tax.
- *Solution:* Reduce taxpayer burden and government costs to process and store the same information twice by eliminating duplicative reporting requirements for taxpayers with foreign accounts and assets.

**PRESENT LAW**

The Bank Secrecy Act, found primarily in Title 31 of the U.S. Code, requires U.S. citizens and residents to report foreign accounts to FinCEN when the combined value of those accounts exceeds \$10,000 at any time during the calendar year.<sup>1</sup> Individuals comply with this requirement using FinCEN Report 114, Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts (FBAR).

The Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) added § 6038D to the IRC (Title 26).<sup>2</sup> It requires U.S. citizens, residents, and certain non-residents to report foreign assets exceeding specified thresholds to the IRS. They must file IRS Form 8938, Statement of Specified Foreign Financial Assets, with their annual income tax return to comply with this requirement. IRC § 6038D authorizes the IRS to issue regulations or other guidance to provide exceptions from FATCA reporting, including when the reporting would duplicate other disclosures.<sup>3</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Many U.S. taxpayers, particularly those abroad, face increased compliance burdens and costs because the FATCA and FBAR reporting requirements significantly overlap.<sup>4</sup> The duplicative reporting regime is also inefficient for the government, with the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reporting it “creates additional costs to the government to process and store the same or similar information twice, and enforce reporting compliance with both requirements.”<sup>5</sup>

1 31 U.S.C. § 5314; 31 C.F.R. § 1010.306(c). The authority to enforce the Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts (FBAR) reporting requirements has been redelegated from FinCEN to the IRS. See 31 C.F.R. § 1010.810(g).

2 Pub. L. No. 111-147, Title V, Subtitle A, § 511(a), 124 Stat. 71, 109-110 (2010).

3 The IRS has provided exceptions for assets reported on certain IRS international information returns and for assets held in the U.S. territories by *bona fide* residents of the territories. Treas. Reg. § 1.6038D-7(a)(1), (c).

4 For a comparison of the requirements, see IRS, Comparison of Form 8938 and FBAR Requirements, <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/comparison-of-form-8938-and-fbar-requirements> (last updated Sept. 18, 2024).

5 GAO, GAO-19-180, *Foreign Asset Reporting: Actions Needed to Enhance Compliance Efforts, Eliminate Overlapping Requirements, and Mitigate Burdens on U.S. Persons Abroad* 42-43 (2019), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-180>.

We believe two bureaus within the same cabinet department (Treasury) should harmonize their information collection procedures to reduce the significant burdens the current reporting regime creates for taxpayers. At the same time, we recognize there are complexities that can only be addressed through legislation. FATCA reporting and FBAR reporting serve different purposes, and while there is significant overlap between the two, they are not identical with respect to whom they apply, which assets must be reported, and the information collected.<sup>6</sup> We also recognize the challenges the IRS faces when working with Title 31 requirements and FinCEN guidance that differ from the Title 26 rules. We concur with the GAO's assessment that a legislative change to the FATCA and FBAR statutes is necessary to eliminate overlapping reporting requirements and the collection of duplicative information, while still ensuring each agency retains access to the information it needs.<sup>7</sup>

The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends Congress amend Titles 26 and 31 to eliminate FATCA reporting when a foreign financial account is correctly reported on an FBAR. The National Taxpayer Advocate also recommends Congress provide a limited exception from FATCA reporting for financial accounts held in the country in which a U.S. taxpayer is a *bona fide* resident (commonly known as a "same-country" exception).<sup>8</sup> If adopted, these recommendations would reduce compliance burdens for U.S. taxpayers who currently must navigate the complex and duplicative reporting regime themselves or pay higher fees to tax professionals to do it for them, and could reduce the government resources required to process and store the same information twice.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend IRC § 6038D and 31 U.S.C. § 5314 to eliminate duplicative reporting of assets on IRS Form 8938 when a foreign financial account is correctly reported on an FBAR, while ensuring each agency's continued access to information.<sup>9</sup>
- Amend IRC § 6038D to exclude accounts maintained by a financial institution organized under the laws of the country of which a U.S. person is a *bona fide* resident from the specified foreign financial assets required to be reported on IRS Form 8938.<sup>10</sup>
- Authorize the Secretary of the Treasury to issue regulations under Titles 26 and 31 to harmonize the FATCA and FBAR reporting requirements and direct the Secretary to issue such regulations within one calendar year from the effective date of the legislation.

6 While FATCA reporting is focused on identifying income from foreign sources and curbing taxpayer noncompliance, FBAR reporting is focused on identifying money laundering and other financial crimes.

7 GAO, GAO-19-180, *Foreign Asset Reporting: Actions Needed to Enhance Compliance Efforts, Eliminate Overlapping Requirements, and Mitigate Burdens on U.S. Persons Abroad* 25-26 (2019), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-180>.

8 We understand that FATCA reporting burdens have caused some foreign financial institutions to decline to do business with U.S. expatriates, making it difficult for U.S. citizens to open bank accounts in some countries. An exception for *bona fide* residents of a foreign country would reduce those burdens without substantially undermining the purpose of FATCA, because individuals who open bank accounts in the country in which they reside are more likely to need the account for legitimate purposes and less likely to be engaged in tax evasion than individuals who open accounts in countries with which they have little connection. For additional discussion, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2015 Annual Report to Congress 353-363 (Legislative Recommendation: *Foreign Account Reporting: Eliminate Duplicative Reporting of Certain Foreign Financial Assets and Adopt a Same-Country Exception for Reporting Financial Assets Held in the Country in Which a U.S. Taxpayer is a Bona Fide Resident*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC15\\_Volume1\\_LR\\_05\\_Foreign-Acct-Reporting.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC15_Volume1_LR_05_Foreign-Acct-Reporting.pdf).

9 For legislative language taking a different approach to harmonization, see Tax Simplification for Americans Abroad Act, H.R. 5432, 118th Cong. § 4 (2023), which would amend 31 U.S.C. § 5314 to provide that a taxpayer could satisfy FBAR requirements by attaching information required under IRC § 6038D to the annual tax return.

10 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see, e.g., Overseas Americans Financial Access Act, H.R. 5799, 117th Cong. § 3 (2021).

**Legislative Recommendation #8****Authorize the Use of Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Grant Funding to Assist Taxpayers With Applications for Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The tax code requires millions of individuals who are not eligible for Social Security numbers (SSNs) to file tax returns. To process returns from these individuals, the IRS generally requires them to obtain Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs). However, the process for obtaining ITINs is complex and confusing, especially for non-English speaking individuals who cannot afford professional tax advice. Certifying Acceptance Agents (CAAs) can help.
- *Solution:* Authorize Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) programs to use federal grant funds to provide CAA services.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6109(a)(1) authorizes the Secretary to require taxpayers to include a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) on tax returns and other documents.<sup>1</sup> Most taxpayers use SSNs for this purpose, but taxpayers who are not eligible for SSNs generally must request an ITIN from the IRS.<sup>2</sup>

In 1996, the IRS published guidance allowing CAAs to assist taxpayers with ITIN applications and to authenticate identification documents.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, Congress codified the IRS's use of "community-based certified acceptance agents" and directed the IRS to develop strategies to expand the CAA program and encourage participation in it.<sup>4</sup>

IRC § 7526A, enacted as part of the Taxpayer First Act, authorizes the IRS to award federal grants for the development, expansion, or continuation of VITA programs.<sup>5</sup> VITA programs offer free tax preparation services to eligible taxpayers.<sup>6</sup> IRS community partner organizations operate VITA sites and staff them with IRS-certified volunteers.<sup>7</sup> IRC § 7526A(b) enumerates the permissible uses of VITA grant funds, but it does not specifically enumerate costs associated with providing CAA services as a permissible use.

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<sup>1</sup> See Treas. Reg. § 301.6109-1(b).

<sup>2</sup> Treas. Reg. § 301.6109-1(a)(1)(ii)(B). Taxpayers apply for an ITIN using Form W-7, Application for IRS Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (Aug. 2019), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw7.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See Rev. Proc. 96-52, 1996-2 C.B. 372, *superseded by* Rev. Proc. 2006-10, 2006-1 C.B. 293.

<sup>4</sup> Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 (commonly referred to as the Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes Act of 2015), Pub. L. No. 114-113, Div. Q, Title IV, § 203, 129 Stat. 2242, 3078 (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1401, 133 Stat. 981, 993 (2019).

<sup>6</sup> IRS, Free Tax Return Preparation for Qualifying Taxpayers, <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/free-tax-return-preparation-for-qualifying-taxpayers> (last updated Oct. 17, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

The need for ITINs is extensive. During 2022, the IRS received about 3.8 million individual tax returns that included an ITIN.<sup>8</sup> A significant but unknown number of additional individuals do not file required returns each year because they are unable to navigate the ITIN application process.

To protect against fraud, the IRS understandably applies strict rules to the verification of identification documents supporting ITIN applications.<sup>9</sup> However, the IRS's requirements make the ITIN application process difficult. First, the ITIN application itself can be challenging to fill out, particularly for non-English speaking individuals. Second, an individual who prepares and submits an ITIN application without assistance must provide original identity documents with the application, which may include passports, birth certificates, driver's licenses, and visas. The IRS will return these documents after verifying them. The IRS website says the agency is currently taking seven to 11 weeks to process ITIN applications.<sup>10</sup> Many people are uncomfortable mailing their identity documents to the IRS, not having the documents while the IRS reviews them, and risking the IRS will lose the documents.

Taxpayers can avoid mailing their identity documents to the IRS if they obtain assistance with their ITIN application at an IRS Taxpayer Assistance Center (TAC) or from a CAA. Both TAC employees and CAAs are authorized to authenticate certain identifying documents.

The CAA program is particularly useful for three reasons. First, the IRS approves ITIN applications prepared with CAA assistance at higher rates than applications prepared with either TAC assistance or sent directly by ITIN applicants.<sup>11</sup> CAAs are certified in forensic document training and must undergo regular IRS compliance reviews.<sup>12</sup> In addition, if the IRS needs more information about a CAA-assisted application, the IRS can contact the CAA directly, which can lead to a more efficient resolution of issues.

Second, as Congress emphasized in its 2015 legislation, it is important for the CAA program to be “community-based.” Because many ITIN applicants are immigrants to the United States, CAAs often need to be able to work in a foreign language or understand the unique features of identification documents from a taxpayer's home country or region within that country.<sup>13</sup>

While some CAAs work through nonprofit organizations, many do not, with some CAAs reportedly charging thousands of dollars for ITIN application assistance.<sup>14</sup> VITA programs could provide CAA services to a broader swath of taxpayers at no cost.

8 IRS, Compliance Data Warehouse (CDW), Individual Returns Transaction File Table (IRTF), IRTF\_F1040 Table, IRTF\_TIN\_INFO Table TYs 2019-2022 (through June 27, 2024).

9 For a discussion on ITIN processing, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2024 Annual Report to Congress, <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/AnnualReport2024>.

10 IRS, ITIN Expiration Frequently Asked Questions, <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/itin-expiration-faqs> (last updated Aug. 19, 2024).

11 For a discussion on ITIN processing, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2024 Annual Report to Congress, <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/AnnualReport2024>.

12 See IRS, ITIN Acceptance Agent Program Changes, <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/itin-acceptance-agent-program-changes> (last updated Sept. 6, 2024).

13 The IRS Advisory Council has recommended expansion of CAAs at VITA sites. See IRS, Pub. 5316, Internal Revenue Service Advisory Council Public Report 165-166 (Nov. 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5316.pdf>; see also letter from Coalition for Immigrant Taxpayer Experience, to Danny Werfel, Comm'r, Internal Revenue (Mar. 4, 2024) (on file with TAS) (agreeing with the IRS Advisory Council's recommendations to expand CAA services at VITA sites).

14 Discussion during ITIN unit site visit (Sept. 10, 2024).

Third, VITA sites principally prepare tax returns, and taxpayers generally must submit ITIN applications in conjunction with a tax return. Thus, awarding funding for VITA sites to prepare ITIN applications along with tax returns would provide “one-stop shopping” for these individuals.<sup>15</sup>

The IRS office that manages VITA – Stakeholder Partnerships, Education and Communication – focuses on developing and supporting partnerships with local organizations that have pre-established relationships and successful track records assisting people in their communities.<sup>16</sup> Expanding the availability of CAAs at VITA sites would provide ITIN taxpayers with access to trusted partners in their communities who can assist them in preparing both ITIN applications and tax returns, increasing the accuracy of these filings at no cost to taxpayers.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 7526A(b) to add the ordinary and necessary costs of providing CAA services as a permissible use of VITA grant funds.

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15 Most ITIN taxpayers would have qualified for return preparation assistance from VITA based on income limits in 2023, yet relatively few such taxpayers used VITA for that purpose. Among ITIN taxpayers who used a tax return preparer, 90.3 percent relied on a non-credentialed preparer. IRS, CDW, IRTF, Individual Master File, Return Review Program Preparer Tax Identification Number Table, TYs 2019-2023, (through Aug. 22, 2024). If these taxpayers could obtain return preparation assistance at the same time they apply for ITINs, they would be more likely to use VITA programs for return preparation, saving themselves tax preparation fees and likely filing more accurate returns. See IRS, Pub. 5162, Compliance Estimates for the EITC Claimed on 2006-2008 Returns 26 (Aug. 2014), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-soi/EITCComplianceStudyTY2006-2008.pdf> (finding EITC overclaims on 51.5 percent of returns prepared by unenrolled tax return preparers as compared with 23 percent of returns prepared at VITA, Tax Counseling for the Elderly, or IRS locations. These percentages represent the average between the IRS lower bound and upper bound estimates.).

16 See Internal Revenue Manual 22.30.1.1.1, Background (Sept. 4, 2020), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part22/irm\\_22-030-001](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part22/irm_22-030-001).

## IMPROVE ASSESSMENT AND COLLECTION PROCEDURES

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### Legislative Recommendation #9

## Require That Math Error Notices Describe the Reason(s) for the Adjustment With Specificity, Inform Taxpayers They May Request Abatement Within 60 Days, and Be Mailed by Certified or Registered Mail

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* Each year, the IRS sends millions of “math error” notices to taxpayers that propose to adjust their tax liabilities. These notices often do not explain the reasons for the adjustments, and some are never received by the taxpayer. The IRS is not required to inform taxpayers that they must dispute the adjustments within 60 days if they disagree or generally forfeit their right to do so.
- *Solution:* Require that all math error notices provide a clear explanation of the error alleged, be sent via certified or registered mail, and inform taxpayers they have 60 days from the date of the notice to request the math error adjustment be abated or the adjustment generally will become final.

### PRESENT LAW

Under IRC § 6213(b) the IRS may make a summary assessment of tax arising from a mathematical or clerical error, as defined in IRC § 6213(g). Summary assessment is often referred to as “math error” authority. When the IRS makes a math error adjustment, IRC § 6213(b)(1) requires it to send the taxpayer a notice describing “the error alleged and an explanation thereof.” By law, the taxpayer has 60 days from the date of the notice to request that the summary assessment be abated.<sup>1</sup> If the taxpayer does not make an abatement request within 60 days, the assessment becomes final, and the taxpayer has generally lost their right to challenge the IRS’s position in the U.S. Tax Court. If the taxpayer requests abatement within the 60-day period, the IRS must abate the summary assessment. If the IRS continues to believe the taxpayer owes the tax, it may audit the taxpayer and propose an adjustment by issuing a notice of deficiency. If the IRS does so, the taxpayer will have the right to challenge the IRS’s position in the U.S. Tax Court.

### REASONS FOR CHANGE

Many taxpayers do not understand that the failure to respond to an IRS math error notice within 60 days means they have conceded the adjustment and, except in limited circumstances, have forfeited their right to challenge the IRS’s position in Tax Court. Notably, the law does not specify how the IRS must describe the math error or require the IRS to inform taxpayers they have 60 days to request that the math error assessment be reversed. Further, unlike a statutory notice of deficiency, which carries consequences similar to that of a math error notice (*i.e.*, assessment of tax that may result in future collection actions), IRC § 6213 does not require the IRS to send a math error notice by certified or registered mail.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> IRC § 6213(b)(2)(A).

<sup>2</sup> IRC § 6212(a) (“If the Secretary determines that there is a deficiency in respect of any tax imposed ... he is authorized to send notice of such deficiency to the taxpayer by certified mail or registered mail.”).

Although the statute requires the IRS to “set forth the error alleged and an explanation thereof” in a notice, the descriptions the IRS provides are often very general. Some notices provide taxpayers with a list of possible errors and do not specify which one the IRS believes the taxpayer committed – sometimes leaving the taxpayer uncertain why the IRS made the adjustment. Other notices indicate a taxpayer understated their adjusted gross income but do not specify which item of gross income was understated.

It is unclear whether the IRS’s explanation of alleged errors satisfies the statutory requirement when it makes a general statement or states that the error is due to one of multiple possible causes, as the statute does not describe the degree of specificity required. However, it is clear that the omission of the 60-day language from math error notices does not invalidate the notices because IRC § 6213(b) does not require the IRS to tell taxpayers they have 60 days to request an abatement. While the IRS generally provides this information, the practice should not be discretionary. During calendar year 2021, the IRS neglected to include language informing taxpayers they have 60 days to request an abatement in over 5 million math error notices.<sup>3</sup> Although the IRS later corrected this omission by sending taxpayers letters explaining the 60-day period, many taxpayers were left confused about what they needed to do, if anything.

Amending IRC § 6213(b) to require that the IRS specifically describe the error giving rise to the adjustment and inform taxpayers they have 60 days to request that the summary assessment be abated would help ensure taxpayers understand the adjustment and their rights. Requiring that the notice be sent by either certified or registered mail would underscore the significance of the notice and provide an additional safeguard to ensure that taxpayers are receiving this critical information.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6213(b)(1) to require that:
  - All math error notices must provide a detailed explanation of the specific error, including the line number on the return or the line number on the schedule (whichever is more specific) on which the alleged error was made.
  - All math error notices must include a statement that the taxpayer has 60 days from the date of the notice to request that the summary assessment be abated and must prominently display at the top of the notice the date on which the 60-day period expires.
  - All such notices must be sent by either certified or registered mail.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Erin M. Collins, Math Error, Part II: Math Error Notices Aren’t Just Confusing; Millions of Notices Adjusting the Recovery Rebate Credit Also Omitted Critical Information, NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE BLOG (Aug. 3, 2021), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog-math-error-part-ii-math-error-notices-arent-just-confusing-millions-of-notices-adjusting-the-recovery-rebate-credit-also-omitted-critical-information>.

4 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Internal Revenue Service Math and Taxpayer Help Act, S. 4549 and H.R.8067, 118th Cong. (2024).

**Legislative Recommendation #10****Continue to Limit the IRS's Use of "Math Error Authority" to Clear-Cut Categories Specified by Statute****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The tax law generally requires the IRS to follow "deficiency procedures" when it determines a taxpayer owes additional tax, and deficiency procedures give taxpayers the right to challenge the IRS determination in the U.S. Tax Court. However, the law also gives the IRS the authority to provisionally bypass deficiency procedures and summarily assess tax when a tax return contains one of 22 categories of "mathematical or clerical errors" (often referred to as "math errors"). On several occasions, the Department of the Treasury (Treasury) has requested that Congress grant it the authority to add new categories of math errors by regulation. This change could have the effect of depriving taxpayers of deficiency procedures (and thus the right to challenge the IRS's position in the Tax Court) in a wider range of circumstances.
- *Solution:* Congress should retain the sole authority to revise categories of math errors and not give Treasury the authority to add new categories of math errors by regulation, and it should impose additional safeguards regarding when the IRS may use math error authority.

**PRESENT LAW**

Before the IRS may assess a deficiency, IRC § 6213(a) ordinarily requires that it send the taxpayer a "notice of deficiency" that gives the taxpayer 90 days (or 150 days if addressed to a taxpayer outside the United States) to challenge the IRS's position by filing a petition with the U.S. Tax Court (known as "deficiency procedures"). The taxpayer's ability to appeal a deficiency determination to the Tax Court before paying the tax is central to the taxpayer *right to appeal an IRS decision in an independent forum*.<sup>1</sup>

As an exception to standard deficiency procedures, IRC § 6213(b)(1) authorizes the IRS to summarily assess and collect tax without first providing the taxpayer with a notice of deficiency or access to the Tax Court when addressing "mathematical and clerical" errors (known as "math error authority"). If a taxpayer contests a math error notice within 60 days, IRC § 6213(b)(2)(A) requires that the IRS abate the assessment. If the IRS abates the assessment, it must follow deficiency procedures if it wishes to reassess the tax. If taxpayers fail to respond to a math error notice timely, they lose their right to challenge the liability in court prior to assessment. The IRS may summarily assess deficiencies arising from 22 types of mathematical or clerical errors, which IRC § 6213(g)(2), subparagraphs A-V, codifies.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Congress generally requires the IRS to follow deficiency procedures, which provide taxpayers with notice and a reasonable opportunity to challenge the IRS's tax adjustment, most importantly by giving them an opportunity to dispute an adverse IRS determination in an independent judicial forum (*i.e.*, the U.S. Tax Court) before being required to pay additional tax. Congress authorized math error authority, which provides fewer taxpayer protections, as a limited exception to regular deficiency procedures. It allows the IRS to make adjustments in cases of clear taxpayer error, such as where a taxpayer incorrectly adds numbers or incorrectly

<sup>1</sup> See IRC § 7803(a)(3)(E) (identifying the *right to appeal an IRS decision in an independent forum* as a taxpayer right).

transcribes a number from one form to another. If a taxpayer who receives a math error notice does not ask the IRS to abate the tax within 60 days, the taxpayer loses the right to Tax Court review before the IRS makes the assessment.

Math error procedures are cheaper and simpler for the IRS than deficiency procedures. For that reason, Treasury has previously requested that Congress grant it the authority to assess tax without issuing a statutory notice of deficiency where the information provided by the taxpayer does not match the information contained in government databases or other third-party databases Treasury specifies in regulations – what it refers to as “correctable errors.”<sup>2</sup>

The National Taxpayer Advocate is concerned about the impact on taxpayer rights of giving Treasury broad authority to add new categories of math error by regulation. The National Taxpayer Advocate’s Reports to Congress have documented numerous circumstances in which the IRS has used math error authority to address discrepancies that have undermined taxpayer rights.<sup>3</sup>

If the IRS uses math error authority to address more complex issues that require additional fact finding, its assessments are more likely to be wrong, and the IRS’s computer-generated notices, which confuse many taxpayers in the simplest of circumstances, are likely to become even more difficult to understand.<sup>4</sup>

Math error authority is appropriate for the IRS to use where required schedules are omitted or where annual or lifetime dollar caps have been exceeded. It is also appropriate to use where there is a discrepancy between a return entry and data available to the IRS from certain reliable government databases, such as records maintained by the Social Security Administration. But Treasury and the IRS should not be the sole arbiters of that reliability. Rather, Congress should retain the authority to determine whether the administrative “efficiency” of using math error authority in specific instances outweighs the loss of the significant taxpayer protections deficiency procedures provide.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Refrain from giving Treasury the authority to add new categories of “correctable errors” by regulation. Because the deficiency procedures created by Congress provide important taxpayer protections, Congress should retain the sole authority to determine whether and when to create exceptions to deficiency procedures by adding categories of mathematical or clerical errors.

2 See, e.g., STAFF OF J. COMM. ON TAX’N, 116TH CONG., DESCRIPTION OF CERTAIN REVENUE PROVISIONS CONTAINED IN THE PRESIDENT’S FISCAL YEAR 2020 BUDGET PROPOSAL 62, 64, JCS-1-19 (July 8, 2019), <https://www.jct.gov/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=7375e9d9-b13c-4692-a667-7e66ec7234e9>; Dep’t of the Treasury, *General Explanations of the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2016 Revenue Proposals* 245-246 (Feb. 2015) <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/131/General-Explanations-FY2016.pdf>.

3 See, e.g., National Taxpayer Advocate 2018 Annual Report to Congress 164 (Most Serious Problem: *Post-Processing Math Error Authority: The IRS Has Failed to Exercise Self-Restraint in Its Use of Math Error Authority, Thereby Harming Taxpayers*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ARC18\\_Volume1\\_MSP\\_11\\_PostProcessing.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ARC18_Volume1_MSP_11_PostProcessing.pdf); National Taxpayer Advocate 2018 Annual Report to Congress 174 (Most Serious Problem: *Math Error Notices: Although the IRS Has Made Some Improvements, Math Error Notices Continue to Be Unclear and Confusing, Thereby Undermining Taxpayer Rights and Increasing Taxpayer Burden*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ARC18\\_Volume1\\_MSP\\_12\\_MathError.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ARC18_Volume1_MSP_12_MathError.pdf).

4 The National Taxpayer Advocate also recommends that Congress require the IRS to improve the specificity of math error notices and make them easier to understand. See *Require That Math Error Notices Describe the Reason(s) for the Adjustment With Specificity, Inform Taxpayers They May Request Abatement Within 60 Days, and Be Mailed by Certified or Registered Mail*, *supra*. Bipartisan legislation has recently been introduced that would generally adopt this recommendation. See Internal Revenue Service Math and Taxpayer Help Act, H.R. 8067 & S. 4549, 118th Cong. § 2 (2024). See also Erin M. Collins, Math Error, Part I, NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE BLOG (July 28, 2021), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog-math-error-part-i/>; Erin M. Collins, Math Error, Part II: Math Error Notices Aren’t Just Confusing; Millions of Notices Adjusting the Recovery Rebate Credit Also Omitted Critical Information, NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE BLOG (Aug. 3, 2021), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog-math-error-part-ii-math-error-notices-arent-just-confusing-millions-of-notices-adjusting-the-recovery-rebate-credit-also-omitted-critical-information/>.

- Amend IRC § 6213(b) to permit an assessment arising out of mathematical or clerical errors only when the IRS has researched all information in its possession that could help reconcile the discrepancy.
- Amend IRC § 6213(g) to authorize the IRS to exercise its existing (and any new) authority to summarily assess a deficiency due to “clerical errors” only where: (i) there is a discrepancy between a return entry and reliable government data; (ii) the IRS’s notice clearly describes the discrepancy and how to contest it; (iii) the IRS has researched all information in its possession that could help reconcile the discrepancy; and (iv) the IRS does not have to evaluate documentation to make a determination.
- Amend IRC § 6213 to provide that the IRS is not authorized to use any new criteria or data to make summary assessments unless Treasury, in consultation with the National Taxpayer Advocate, has evaluated and publicly reported on the reliability of the criteria or data for that intended use.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a more limited recommendation, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2015 Annual Report to Congress 329 (Legislative Recommendation: *Math Error Authority: Authorize the IRS to Summarily Assess Math and “Correctable” Errors Only in Appropriate Circumstances*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC15\\_Volume1\\_LR\\_02\\_Math-Error-Authority.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC15_Volume1_LR_02_Math-Error-Authority.pdf).

**Legislative Recommendation #11****Require Independent Managerial Review and Written Approval Before the IRS May Assert Multiyear Bans Barring Taxpayers From Receiving Certain Tax Credits and Clarify That the Tax Court Has Jurisdiction to Review the Assertion of Multiyear Bans****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Refundable credits, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC), can be a lifeline for many low-income families, accounting for a high percentage of their household incomes. To deter improper claims, the law requires the IRS to ban taxpayers who make improper claims from receiving these credits under certain circumstances in future years – even if the taxpayers otherwise meet all eligibility requirements in those future years. Because a multiyear ban against receiving these tax credits can have financially devastating consequences, it is critical that there be adequate administrative and judicial safeguards to ensure they are only imposed in appropriate cases.
- *Solution:* Require IRS managerial approval of multiyear bans and clarify that the Tax Court has jurisdiction to review the imposition of a ban for the years in which the ban is imposed.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC §§ 24(g), 25A(b), and 32(k) require the IRS to ban a taxpayer from claiming the CTC, the Credit for Other Dependents (ODC), the American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC), and the EITC for two years if the IRS makes a final determination that the taxpayer improperly claimed the credit with reckless or intentional disregard of rules and regulations. The duration of the ban increases to ten years if the IRS makes a final determination that the credit was claimed fraudulently. These code sections refer to the years for which the ban is imposed as the “disallowance period.”<sup>1</sup>

IRC § 6214 grants the Tax Court jurisdiction to redetermine a deficiency for the tax year(s) before the court, but it does not grant the Tax Court jurisdiction to redetermine deficiencies for other tax years.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Congress directed the IRS to impose multiyear bans on CTC, ODC, AOTC, and EITC eligibility to deter and penalize certain taxpayers who improperly claim these credits. These multiyear bans are unique in tax law because they prevent taxpayers from receiving credits in future years, even if they otherwise satisfy all eligibility requirements in those years.

Refundable credits can be a lifeline for low-income taxpayers. A 2019 TAS study found that, on average, the amount of disallowed EITC accounted 23 percent of eligible taxpayers’ adjusted gross incomes.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is critical that there be adequate safeguards to ensure both that the IRS imposes a ban only when a taxpayer acts with the requisite improper intent and that a taxpayer has access to meaningful judicial review of an IRS ban determination.

<sup>1</sup> IRC §§ 24(g)(1)(A), 25A(b)(4)(A)(i), 32(k)(1)(A).

<sup>2</sup> National Taxpayer Advocate 2019 Annual Report to Congress vol. 2, at 239, 250 (Research Study: *Study of Two-Year Bans on the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and American Opportunity Tax Credit*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC19\\_Volume1\\_TRRS\\_02\\_EITCban.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC19_Volume1_TRRS_02_EITCban.pdf).

## Written Managerial Approval

In most ban cases, IRS procedures require a manager to review the case independently and approve the assertion of a ban in writing.<sup>3</sup> However, the IRS's internal rules allow the agency to impose two-year bans automatically in some EITC cases,<sup>4</sup> and the IRS expanded its practice of automatically imposing bans to include the refundable portion of the CTC (referred to as the Additional Child Tax Credit, or ACTC).<sup>5</sup> Three TAS research studies of two-year ban cases found that managerial approval, even where required, is often lacking.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, because the IRS's policy of requiring managerial approval of multiyear bans is administrative the IRS may eliminate or weaken the requirement at any time.

The National Taxpayer Advocate does not believe that multiyear bans should ever be imposed by automatic or systemic means. The law provides for imposition of the two-year ban only in cases where the IRS determines a taxpayer acted recklessly or with intentional disregard of rules and regulations, and it provides for imposition of the ten-year ban only in cases where the IRS determines a taxpayer's claim was fraudulent. Notably, the law does not permit the IRS to impose a multiyear ban when an improper claim is due to inadvertent error, or even due to negligence.

A computer is not capable of assessing a taxpayer's state of mind and therefore cannot determine whether an improper claim was due to reckless or intentional disregard of rules and regulations. This determination requires an independent facts-and-circumstances investigation by an employee. In light of the potentially harsh financial impact of multiyear bans, managerial approval should be required in all cases before they are imposed.

## Tax Court Jurisdiction

Although a taxpayer should be able to obtain independent Tax Court review of a multiyear ban, it is not clear whether, or when, the Tax Court has the jurisdiction to reverse a multiyear ban. That is because the imposition of a ban and the effect of a ban on a taxpayer's tax liability occur in different tax years.

The Tax Court may not have jurisdiction to reverse a ban in the year it is imposed. IRC § 6214 generally limits the Tax Court to determining the amount of tax owed in the tax year(s) before it. By its nature, a ban against claiming tax credits in future years will affect the taxpayer's tax liability in future years – not in the year in which it is imposed.<sup>7</sup>

The Tax Court may also lack jurisdiction to reverse a ban in the years in which the ban is in effect. By operation of law, a ban automatically denies benefits in future years. If a taxpayer challenges the IRS's

3 Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) 4.19.14.7.1(2), 2/10 Year Ban – Correspondence Guidelines for Examination Technicians (CET) (Jan. 3, 2023), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm\\_04-019-014r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm_04-019-014r).

4 IRM 4.19.14.7.1.5, Project Codes 0027 and 0028 – EITC Recertification with a Proposed 2 Year EITC Ban (Jan. 3, 2023), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm\\_04-019-014r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm_04-019-014r).

5 The American Rescue Plan Act, Pub. L. No. 117-2, § 9611, 135 Stat. 4, 144 (2021), made the CTC fully refundable for tax year 2021. See Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, Ref. No. 2021-40-036, *Improper Payment Rates for Refundable Tax Credits Remain High* 8 (2021) (reporting that “IRS management stated that, starting in Processing Year 2021, systemic processes will assess the two-year ban for the ACTC.”), <https://www.tigta.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2022-02/202140036fr.pdf>.

6 See National Taxpayer Advocate 2023 Annual Report to Congress, 2023 Research Reports, at 27, 34 (Research Study: *Study of the Two-Year Bans on the Earned Income Tax Credit, Additional Child Tax Credit, and American Opportunity Tax Credit*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ARC-2023\\_TAS-Research-Report\\_WEB\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ARC-2023_TAS-Research-Report_WEB_FINAL.pdf); National Taxpayer Advocate 2019 Annual Report to Congress vol. 2, at 239 (Research Study: *Study of Two-Year Bans on the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and American Opportunity Tax Credit*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC19\\_Volume1\\_TRRS\\_02\\_EITCban.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC19_Volume1_TRRS_02_EITCban.pdf); National Taxpayer Advocate 2013 Annual Report to Congress 103 (Most Serious Problem: *Earned Income Tax Credit: The IRS Inappropriately Bans Many Taxpayers From Claiming EITC*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2013-ARC\\_VOL-1\\_S1-MSP-9.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2013-ARC_VOL-1_S1-MSP-9.pdf).

7 Compare *Garcia v. Comm’r*, T.C. Summ. Op. 2013-28 (holding, in a nonprecedential case, that a ban did not apply), with *Ballard v. Comm’r*, No. 3843-15S (T.C. Feb. 12, 2016) (declining to rule on the application of IRC § 32(k), noting that the application of the ban had no effect on the taxpayer's federal income tax liability for the year before it).

deficiency determination in a year in which the ban denies tax credits, the year in which the ban was initially imposed generally will not be before the court. It is not clear whether the court may reach back to the earlier year to determine whether the ban was properly imposed.

Transparency is a critical element of taxpayer rights and fairness, and taxpayers should understand clearly when they may seek Tax Court review of an adverse IRS determination. In most cases, the law is clear. Here, the law is not clear, and there appear to be four possible outcomes: (i) the Tax Court may have jurisdiction to review a ban both for the year in which it is imposed and for the year in which it is effective; (ii) the Tax Court may have jurisdiction to review a ban for the year in which it is imposed but not for the year in which it is effective; (iii) the Tax Court may not have jurisdiction to review a ban for the year in which it is imposed but may have jurisdiction to review it for the year in which it is effective; or (iv) the Tax Court may not have jurisdiction to review a ban at any time. These procedural uncertainties undermine a taxpayer's *rights to appeal an IRS decision in an independent forum and to a fair and just tax system*.

In general, the Tax Court's jurisdiction to adjust CTC, ODC, AOTC, or EITC claims is based on its deficiency jurisdiction.<sup>8</sup> As noted above, the determination to subject a taxpayer to a multiyear ban does not itself create a deficiency in the current tax year. Therefore, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommends that Congress amend IRC § 6214 to grant the Tax Court jurisdiction to determine whether the ban was properly imposed during a proceeding involving a deficiency created by the imposition of the ban (*i.e.*, during the two years in which the credits are denied rather than the initial year in which the ban was imposed).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend IRC §§ 24(g), 25A(b), and 32(k) to require independent managerial review and written approval based on consideration of all relevant facts and circumstances before the IRS may assert a multiyear ban.<sup>9</sup>
- Amend IRC § 6214 to clarify that the Tax Court has jurisdiction (i) to review the IRS's final determination to impose a multiyear ban under IRC §§ 24(g), 25A(b), or 32(k) in any proceeding involving the years in which the notice of deficiency disallows CTC, ODC, AOTC, or EITC on the basis of a multiyear ban, and (ii) to allow the affected credit if it finds a multiyear ban was improperly imposed and the taxpayer otherwise qualifies for the credit.

<sup>8</sup> IRC §§ 6213(a), 6214(a).

<sup>9</sup> The National Taxpayer Advocate is not proposing to amend IRC § 6751(b) because determinations made by electronic means are exempt from the requirement of supervisory approval under IRC § 6751(b)(2)(B). As discussed above, the determination of the application of a multiyear ban should not be determined electronically and should be reviewed and approved by the supervisor of the employee who makes the determination.

**Legislative Recommendation #12****Give Taxpayers Abroad Additional Time to Request Abatement of a Math Error Assessment****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* U.S. taxpayers abroad generally need more time to respond to IRS notices than taxpayers living within the United States. The tax code gives taxpayers abroad an additional 60 days to respond to a notice of deficiency, but it does not give taxpayers abroad additional time to respond to a math error notice – even though failure to respond to a math error notice within 60 days means the IRS may assess the tax and the taxpayer generally forfeits the right to challenge the IRS’s assessment in the U.S. Tax Court.
- *Solution:* Give taxpayers abroad an additional 60 days to respond to math error notices.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6213(b) authorizes the IRS to make a “summary assessment” of tax arising from mathematical or clerical errors as defined in IRC § 6213(g), thus bypassing otherwise applicable deficiency procedures. Under IRC § 6213(b)(2)(A), however, a taxpayer has 60 days after a math error notice is sent to request that the summary assessment be abated. If the taxpayer makes an abatement request within 60 days, the IRS must abate the summary assessment and then follow deficiency procedures under IRC § 6212 if it wishes to reassess an increase in tax. If the taxpayer does not submit an abatement request within 60 days, the taxpayer generally forfeits the right to dispute the IRS’s assessment by filing a petition in the U.S. Tax Court. No additional time is allowed to request an abatement when the math error notice is addressed to a taxpayer outside the United States.

By contrast, a taxpayer outside the United States who receives a notice of deficiency is given additional time to respond. In general, a taxpayer may file a petition in the Tax Court for a redetermination of a deficiency within 90 days from the date the notice is mailed. However, when the notice of deficiency “is addressed to a person outside the United States,” IRC § 6213(a) provides that the taxpayer has 150 days from the date the notice is mailed to file a Tax Court petition. The Tax Court has construed this language broadly, concluding among other things that the 150-day period for filing a petition applies not only when a notice of deficiency is mailed to an address outside the United States, but also when a notice of deficiency is mailed to an address within the United States, provided the taxpayer is located outside the United States.<sup>1</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

The U.S. State Department has estimated that the number of U.S. citizens residing abroad is about nine million, including students, members of the military, taxpayers working abroad, and retirees.<sup>2</sup> Taxpayers abroad (either temporarily or permanently) often require more time to respond to IRS notices than

1 See, e.g., *Levy v. Comm’r*, 76 T.C. 228 (1981) (holding that the 150-day rule is applicable to a U.S. resident who is temporarily outside the country when the notice is mailed and delivered); *Looper v. Comm’r*, 73 T.C. 690 (1980) (holding that the 150-day rule is applicable when a notice is mailed to an address outside the United States); *Lewy v. Comm’r*, 68 T.C. 779 (1977) (holding that the 150-day rule is applicable to a foreign resident who is in the United States when the notice is mailed but is outside the United States when the notice is delivered); *Hamilton v. Comm’r*, 13 T.C. 747 (1949) (holding that the 150-day rule is applicable to a foreign resident who is outside the United States when the notice is mailed and delivered).

2 See U.S. DEP’T OF STATE, BUREAU OF CONSULAR AFFS., CONSULAR AFFAIRS BY THE NUMBERS (Jan. 2020), <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/travel/CA-By-the-Number-2020.pdf>. TAS is not aware of a more recent government study.

taxpayers living in the United States. Mail delivery takes longer in both directions – in some cases substantially longer. In addition, persons temporarily abroad often do not have access to their tax or financial records, making it difficult for them to respond immediately.

By giving taxpayers abroad 60 additional days to file a petition in the Tax Court in response to a notice of deficiency, Congress recognized that holding overseas taxpayers to the same deadlines as taxpayers located in the United States would be unreasonable. The same logic applies to math error notices. In fact, the need for additional time is arguably greater in the case of math error notices because the standard response deadline is 60 days (as opposed to 90 days for filing a Tax Court petition in response to a notice of deficiency).

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- Amend IRC § 6213(b)(2)(A) to allow taxpayers 120 days to request an abatement of tax when a math error notice is addressed to a person outside the United States.

## Legislative Recommendation #13

## Give Taxpayers Abroad Additional Time to Request a Collection Due Process Hearing and to File a Petition Challenging a Notice of Determination in the Tax Court

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* Taxpayers abroad often experience long delays in receiving mail from the IRS and generally need more time to respond to notices than taxpayers living in the United States. The tax code allows an additional 60 days for taxpayers abroad to challenge a notice of deficiency, but it does not allow additional time to challenge Collection Due Process (CDP) notices. As a result, taxpayers abroad may lose critical administrative, due process, and judicial rights.
- *Solution:* Amend the tax code to allow an additional 60 days for taxpayers abroad to request a CDP hearing and to challenge a CDP notice of determination in the Tax Court.

### PRESENT LAW

IRC § 6320(a) requires the IRS to give taxpayers notice and an opportunity for a hearing after it files a Notice of Federal Tax Lien (CDP lien notice).<sup>1</sup> IRC § 6330(a) generally requires the IRS to give taxpayers notice and an opportunity for a hearing before it issues a levy (CDP levy notice).<sup>2</sup> In both cases, taxpayers have 30 days to request a CDP hearing.<sup>3</sup>

The hearing allows for review of a filed Notice of Federal Tax Lien or a proposed levy and is conducted by an impartial officer of the Independent Office of Appeals (Appeals). It allows a taxpayer the opportunity to raise defenses, challenge the appropriateness of a lien or levy, and propose collection alternatives.<sup>4</sup> A taxpayer may also dispute the existence or amount of the underlying tax liability at a CDP hearing if the taxpayer “did not receive any statutory notice of deficiency for such tax liability or did not otherwise have an opportunity to dispute such tax liability.”<sup>5</sup> If the parties cannot otherwise resolve the issues, Appeals issues a notice of

<sup>1</sup> A CDP lien notice must be sent not more than five business days after the filing of the notice of lien.

<sup>2</sup> A CDP levy notice must be sent not less than 30 days before the day of the first levy unless an exception under IRC § 6330(f) applies.

<sup>3</sup> IRC §§ 6320(a)(3)(B), 6330(a)(3)(B). Taxpayers will still be allowed an Appeals hearing if the request is late, but it is an “equivalent” hearing, not a CDP hearing, and the taxpayer cannot challenge the Appeals determination in Tax Court. Treas. Reg. §§ 301.6320-1(i)(1), 301.6330-1(i)(1). Thus, taxpayers lose the right to judicial review if they miss the 30-day response deadline in IRC §§ 6320(a)(3)(B) and 6330(a)(3)(B). In *Organic Cannabis Found., LLC v. Comm’r*, 161 T.C. 13 (2023), the Tax Court held that the 30-day period for requesting a CDP hearing may be equitably tolled when the circumstances warrant it. However, equitable tolling is applied only sparingly and when taxpayers seeking tolling establish that (i) they pursued their rights diligently and (ii) extraordinary circumstances prevented them from filing timely. See, e.g., *Cunningham v. Comm’r*, 716 F. App’x. 182, 183-184 (4th Cir. 2018) (unpublished) (holding that equitable tolling was not appropriate under the test articulated in *Menominee Indian Tribe of Wis. v. United States*, 577 U.S. 250 (2016), when a taxpayer missed the deadline for responding to a CDP levy notice by one day because she misunderstood the letter).

<sup>4</sup> IRC §§ 6320(c), 6330(c)(2)(A).

<sup>5</sup> IRC §§ 6320(c), 6330(c)(2)(B). The phrase “underlying tax liability” includes the tax deficiency, any penalties, additions to tax, and statutory interest. *Katz v. Comm’r*, 115 T.C. 329, 339 (2000).

determination, which allows the taxpayer 30 days to request judicial review of the IRS's determination in the Tax Court.<sup>6</sup> This 30-day period is statutory.<sup>7</sup>

The time periods provided to request a CDP hearing or to challenge a notice of determination in the Tax Court do not allow additional time for taxpayers abroad to complete these actions. By contrast, IRC § 6213(a) gives taxpayers residing outside the United States an additional 60 days (150 days total) to challenge a deficiency determination under IRC § 6213(a).

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

The U.S. State Department has estimated that the number of U.S. citizens residing abroad is about nine million,<sup>8</sup> including students, members of the military, taxpayers working abroad, and retirees. Mail sent from the United States to taxpayers abroad often takes several weeks to arrive, as does mail sent by taxpayers abroad to the United States. Further, taxpayers abroad often do not have ready access to their tax and financial records and often are unable to obtain assistance from advisors or the IRS.<sup>9</sup> For these reasons, taxpayers outside the United States frequently need additional time to respond to IRS notices.

Many IRS notices with significant legal consequences impose tight response deadlines that taxpayers abroad cannot meet easily, if at all. In the deficiency context, Congress recognized that the regular 90-day response period set forth in IRC § 6213(a) is not sufficient for taxpayers outside the United States, and it afforded them an additional 60 days (a total of 150 days) in which to challenge a deficiency determination with the Tax Court. In the CDP context, however, taxpayers are only given 30 days to request a CDP lien or levy hearing or to seek judicial review of an adverse IRS determination with the Tax Court. Such an abbreviated timeframe is prejudicial for these taxpayers.

Consistent with the extra 60 days taxpayers abroad have been given to respond to notices of deficiency, we recommend taxpayers abroad be given an extra 60 days to respond to CDP notices. In practice, the need for extra time for taxpayers abroad is even greater for CDP notices; meeting the standard 90-day response deadline for notices of deficiency is at least plausible, while meeting the standard 30-day response deadline for CDP notices generally is not.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC §§ 6320(a)(3)(B), 6330(a)(3)(B), and 6330(d)(1) to allow 90 days (*i.e.*, an additional 60 days) (i) to request a CDP hearing after the issuance of a CDP lien or levy notice and (ii) to file a petition for review in the Tax Court after the issuance of a notice of determination if the notice is addressed to a person outside the United States.

<sup>6</sup> IRC §§ 6320(c), 6330(d)(1).

<sup>7</sup> IRC § 6330(d)(1). In *Boechler, P.C. v. Comm'r*, 596 U.S. 199 (2022), the Supreme Court held that the 30-day time limit is not jurisdictional and may be equitably tolled when the circumstances warrant it. However, equitable tolling is applied only sparingly and when taxpayers seeking tolling establish that (i) they pursued their rights diligently and (ii) extraordinary circumstances prevented them from filing timely. See *Menominee Indian Tribe of Wis. v. United States*, 577 U.S. 250, 255 (2016).

<sup>8</sup> See U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, BUREAU OF CONSULAR AFFS., CONSULAR AFFAIRS BY THE NUMBERS (Jan. 2020), <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/travel/CA-By-the-Number-2020.pdf>. TAS is not aware of a more recent government study.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the challenges faced by taxpayers abroad, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2023 Annual Report to Congress 116 (Most Serious Problem: *Compliance Challenges for Taxpayers Abroad: Taxpayers Abroad Continue to Be Underserved and Face Significant Challenges in Meeting Their U.S. Tax Obligations*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ARC23\\_MSP\\_09\\_Compliance-Abroad.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ARC23_MSP_09_Compliance-Abroad.pdf).

**Legislative Recommendation #14****Provide That Assessable Penalties Are Subject to Deficiency Procedures****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* To judicially challenge an “assessable penalty,” a taxpayer must pay the penalty in full and then bring suit in a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims to recover the payment. The inability of taxpayers to obtain judicial review prior to assessment and the requirement they pay the penalties in full to obtain judicial review after assessment can effectively deprive taxpayers of the right to judicial review.
- *Solution:* Give taxpayers an opportunity to challenge assessable penalties in the U.S. Tax Court before assessment by making these penalties subject to deficiency procedures.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6212 requires the IRS to issue a “notice of deficiency” before assessing certain liabilities. When the IRS issues a notice of deficiency, IRC § 6213 authorizes the taxpayer to petition the U.S. Tax Court within 90 days (or 150 days for notices addressed to a person outside the United States) to review the IRS determination.

IRC § 6671(a) authorizes the IRS to assess some penalties without first issuing a notice of deficiency.<sup>1</sup> These penalties are generally subject to judicial review only if taxpayers first pay the penalties and then incur the costs of filing suit in a U.S. district court or the Court of Federal Claims to recover the payments.<sup>2</sup> These courts generally impose higher filing fees than the U.S. Tax Court, and due to the complexities of their rules and formalities of their procedures, taxpayers usually have to retain an attorney to dispute the assessment.

In addition, some assessable penalties are subject to the “full payment rule.” In *Flora v. United States*,<sup>3</sup> the U.S. Supreme Court held that, with limited exceptions, a taxpayer must fully pay an assessment before filing suit in a U.S. district court or the Court of Federal Claims to obtain judicial review of an adverse IRS determination.<sup>4</sup> Penalties requiring full payment have historically included foreign information reporting penalties under IRC §§ 6038, 6038A, 6038B, 6038C, and 6038D, and penalties relating to reportable transactions under IRC §§ 6707 and 6707A.<sup>5</sup>

Although IRC § 6671(a) authorizes the IRS to immediately assess “assessable” penalties and specifically references only the “penalties and liabilities provided by this subchapter” (*i.e.*, IRC Chapter 68, Subchapter B), the IRS takes the position that various international information return (IIR) penalties contained in Chapter 61, Subchapter A, Part III, Subpart A of the tax code are also immediately assessable without the issuance of a notice of deficiency, including the penalty under IRC § 6038 for failure to file Form 5471, Information

1 These “assessable” penalties are generally ones that are due and payable upon notice and demand. Unlike penalties subject to deficiency procedures, assessable penalties carry no rights to a 30-day letter, agreement form, or notice requirements prior to assessment. Internal Revenue Manual 20.1.9.1.5(2), Common Terms and Acronyms (Jan. 29, 2021), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part20/irm\\_20-001-009](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part20/irm_20-001-009).

2 See IRC § 7422 for requirements relating to refund suits.

3 362 U.S. 145 (1960).

4 One exception to the full payment rule applies to “divisible” taxes. In the case of divisible taxes, a taxpayer may pay only a fraction of the tax and judicially challenge the penalty. These penalties include the trust fund recovery penalty under IRC § 6672(a).

5 Courts ruled that full payment was required prior to a judicial challenge of the IRC § 6707 penalty in *Pfaff v. United States*, 117 A.F.T.R.2d 2016-981 (D. Colo. 2016), and *Diversified Grp., Inc. v. United States*, 841 F.3d 975 (Fed. Cir. 2016).

Return of U.S. Persons With Respect to Certain Foreign Corporations. When applicable, penalties under these sections can be substantial.<sup>6</sup>

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

The IRS's systemic assessment of these assessable penalties creates hardships for taxpayers, causes substantial inequities and inefficiencies in tax administration, and rests on a questionable legal foundation.<sup>7</sup> The IRS's position is that the penalties in Title 26, Subtitle F, Chapter 61, Subchapter A, Part III are not subject to deficiency procedures. The National Taxpayer Advocate's position, consistent with the U.S. Tax Court's holding in *Farhy v. Commissioner*, is that the tax code does not contain or cross-reference language authorizing the IRS to treat these penalties as assessable, and therefore the Department of Justice must institute a civil suit to recover the penalties.<sup>8</sup>

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit reversed the Tax Court's decision in *Farhy*, holding that "the statute's text, structure, and function" indicate the penalties are assessable.<sup>9</sup> But the Tax Court is only required to follow that decision in cases appealable to the D.C. Circuit.<sup>10</sup> In a case appealable to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit, the Tax Court maintained its position that the IIR penalties at issue are not assessable, which could result in a split opinion between circuits.<sup>11</sup> In the meantime, it appears the IRS is not changing its litigation position, leaving taxpayers in a quandary on how to proceed while it continues to assess these penalties. It remains to be seen how the Tax Court will rule, and if it denies the IRS's motion, whether the IRS will appeal to the Eighth Circuit, which could result in a split opinion between circuits.

To protect taxpayer rights, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommends Congress clarify that these penalties cannot be assessed before the IRS issues a notice giving taxpayers the right to judicial review. Taxpayers who are savvy enough to request an abatement based on reasonable cause or a conference with the IRS Independent Office of Appeals frequently obtain relief from assessable penalties, particularly where the IRS imposes a penalty systemically (rather than imposing it manually during an audit). For the most frequently assessed IIR penalties (IRC §§ 6038 and 6038A), TAS has found that across calendar years 2018-2021 the abatement percentage of those systemically assessed as measured by number of penalties was 74 percent and as measured by dollar value was 84 percent, averaged.<sup>12</sup>

6 The amount of the penalty under IRC § 6038 for failure to file Form 5471 with respect to certain foreign corporations and partnerships is \$10,000 for each accounting period. IRC § 6038(b). An additional "continuation penalty" of up to \$50,000 can be added to each penalty if the failure continues for more than 90 days after the IRS sends notice of the failure. IRC § 6038(b)(2). The amount of the penalty under IRC § 6707 for failure to furnish information regarding reportable transactions, other than listed transactions, is \$50,000. IRC § 6707(b)(1). If the penalty is with respect to a listed transaction, the amount of the penalty is the greater of (i) \$200,000 or (ii) 50 percent of the gross income derived by the material advisor with respect to aid, assistance, or advice provided before the date the information return is filed under IRC § 6111. IRC § 6707(b)(2). In *Diversified Group*, the penalties assessed under IRC § 6707 for failure to register its tax shelter totaled \$24.9 million. *Diversified Grp., Inc. v. United States*, 123 Fed. Cl. 442, 445 (Fed. Cl. 2015), *aff'd*, 841 F.3d 975 (Fed. Cir. 2016).

7 See National Taxpayer Advocate 2020 Annual Report to Congress 119 (Most Serious Problem: *International: The IRS's Assessment of International Penalties Under IRC §§ 6038 and 6038A Is Not Supported by Statute, and Systemic Assessments Burden Both Taxpayers and the IRS*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ARC20\\_MSP\\_08\\_International.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ARC20_MSP_08_International.pdf).

8 See *Farhy v. Comm'r*, 160 T.C. 399 (2023), *rev'd and remanded*, 100 F.4th 223 (D.C. Cir. 2024).

9 *Farhy*, 100 F.4th at 236 (D.C. Cir. 2024).

10 See *Golsen v. Comm'r*, 54 T.C. 742 (1970).

11 *Mukhi v. Comm'r*, 162 T.C. No. 8, (Apr. 8, 2024), *adhered to on recons.*, 163 T.C. No. 8 (Nov. 18, 2024).

12 IRS, Compliance Data Warehouse (CDW), Business Master File. Because of such factors as the broad penalty relief provided in IRS Notice 2022-36, 2022-36 I.R.B. 188, Penalty Relief for Certain Taxpayers Filing Returns for Taxable Years 2019 and 2020, and processing delays due to COVID-19, penalty data in any given recent year may not be illustrative of long-term trends. For this reason, we are presenting a four-year average. See also National Taxpayer Advocate 2023 Annual Report to Congress 101, 111 (Most Serious Problem: *International: The IRS's Approach to International Information Return Penalties is Draconian and Inefficient*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ARC23\\_MSP\\_08\\_International.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ARC23_MSP_08_International.pdf). The abatement percentage of those penalties manually assessed as measured by number of penalties was 27 percent and as measured by dollar value was 16 percent. IRS, CDW, Individual Master File (Sept. 2023).

Specifying that deficiency procedures apply would prevent the systemic assessments the IRS often abates, a process that imposes undue burdens on taxpayers and unnecessarily consumes resources for the IRS. Additionally, requiring full payment puts judicial review out of reach for many if not most taxpayers. It is simply wrong to require taxpayers to pay penalties that can be disproportionate to the tax owed without first giving them an opportunity to obtain independent judicial review of the IRS's determination. This is particularly important for taxpayers who face large penalties but have limited resources.

Making assessable penalties subject to deficiency procedures would put pre-assessment judicial review of penalties in the hands of the Tax Court, which has several benefits. Due to the tax expertise of its judges, the Tax Court is generally better equipped to consider tax controversies than other courts. The Tax Court is more accessible to less knowledgeable and unrepresented taxpayers than other courts because it uses informal procedures, particularly in disputes that do not exceed \$50,000. Taxpayers litigating in Tax Court are generally offered the option to receive free legal assistance from a Low Income Taxpayer Clinic or *pro bono* representative. Thus, the Tax Court in most instances is the least expensive and easiest-to-navigate judicial forum for low-income taxpayers.

As noted above, *Farhy* was reversed by the D.C. Circuit but remains applicable to cases appealable to other circuits, thus leaving considerable uncertainty regarding the legal status of Chapter 61, Subchapter A, Part III, Subpart A IIR penalties and resulting in the potential for taxpayers to be treated differently depending on the circuit in which they reside. Congressional action would resolve ambiguity in this area and provide important due process protections for taxpayers.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6212 to require the Secretary to establish procedures to send a notice of IIR penalties to the taxpayer by certified mail or registered mail for adjudication with the U.S. Tax Court prior to assessing any IIR penalty or other IIR penalty listed in Chapter 61, Subchapter A, Part III, Subpart A of the IRC.

**Legislative Recommendation #15****Direct the IRS to Implement an Automated Formula to Identify Taxpayers at Risk of Economic Hardship****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The IRS routinely takes collection actions against taxpayers (through levies and liens) and routinely enters into installment agreements (IAs) with taxpayers without first undertaking a financial analysis to determine whether the taxpayer can afford to make payments. IRS collection actions can have a devastating impact on financially vulnerable taxpayers, potentially leaving them without sufficient funds to pay basic living expenses for themselves and their families. The IRS also wastes resources by pursuing these cases because, among other things, it may later have to reverse collection actions or deal with defaulted IAs.
- *Solution:* Direct the IRS to implement an automated economic hardship screen, similar to the one developed by TAS, to identify taxpayers who are at risk of economic hardship and may qualify for relief under existing tax code provisions.

**PRESENT LAW**

The tax code contains several provisions that protect taxpayers experiencing economic hardship from IRS collection actions. IRC § 6330 authorizes a taxpayer in a Collection Due Process hearing to propose collection alternatives, which may be based on an inability to pay the tax due to economic hardship.

IRC § 6343 requires the IRS to release a levy if the IRS determines the levy “is creating an economic hardship due to the financial condition of the taxpayer.” Under Treasury Regulation § 301.6343-1(b)(4), economic hardship exists when an individual is “unable to pay his or her reasonable basic living expenses.”

IRC § 7122(d) requires the IRS to develop and publish schedules of national and local allowances (known as “allowable living expenses” or ALEs) to ensure that taxpayers entering into offers in compromise are left with “an adequate means to provide for basic living expenses.”

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

In general, the IRS is required to halt collection actions if taxpayers demonstrate that they are in economic hardship. However, the IRS does not proactively seek to identify taxpayers at risk of economic hardship before taking collection actions to ensure that such taxpayers understand their rights and take steps to find out if they qualify for relief.<sup>1</sup> Further, the IRS routinely applies collection treatments that do not require any financial analysis, including entering into streamlined IAs. Because the IRS typically does not place a marker on the accounts of taxpayers who appear to be at elevated risk of economic hardship and because taxpayers are often unaware the IRS must halt collection actions if they cause economic hardship, vulnerable taxpayers may face potentially devastating consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> See National Taxpayer Advocate 2018 Annual Report to Congress 228 (Most Serious Problem: *Economic Hardship: The IRS Does Not Proactively Use Internal Data to Identify Taxpayers at Risk of Economic Hardship Throughout the Collection Process*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ARC18\\_Volume1\\_MSP\\_15\\_EconomicHardship.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ARC18_Volume1_MSP_15_EconomicHardship.pdf).

TAS estimates that about 36 percent of taxpayers who entered into streamlined IAs through the IRS's Automated Collection System (ACS) in fiscal year 2024 had incomes at or below their ALEs.<sup>2</sup> To emphasize the point: More than a third of taxpayers who agreed to streamlined IAs in ACS could potentially have received the benefit of other collection alternatives, such as offers in compromise or Currently Not Collectible-Hardship (CNC-Hardship) status, if they had known to call the IRS to explain their financial circumstances.

That is not a fair result. Whether taxpayers are left with sufficient funds to pay basic living expenses for themselves and their families should not depend on the taxpayers' knowledge of IRS procedural rules.

To address this problem, the TAS Research function has developed an automated algorithm that we believe can, with a high degree of accuracy, identify taxpayers whose incomes are below their ALEs. In a 2020 study, TAS Research compared the results of its algorithm with the results the IRS reached itself when assessing over 242,000 IA applications that required financial analysis during the years 2017-2020. The TAS algorithm and the IRS's financial analysis came to the same conclusion 82 percent of the time.<sup>3</sup> If the IRS uses the TAS algorithm or develops an alternative formula that is more accurate, it could place a "low-income" indicator on the accounts of all taxpayers whom the formula identifies as having incomes below their ALEs.<sup>4</sup> The formula would not constitute a final determination of a taxpayer's financial status or ability to pay, but it would signal that a taxpayer is at risk of economic hardship, and therefore, that the IRS should take additional protective steps.

While the ALE standards represent only average expenses for taxpayers and should not be used to automatically close a case as CNC-Hardship, an ALE-based indicator would be a useful starting point for financial analysis in the collection context. The IRS could use it to alert collection employees speaking with a taxpayer over the phone of the need to request additional financial information so the IRS can analyze the specific facts and circumstances of the taxpayer's case. The IRS could also use it to trigger a notification to taxpayers entering into online IAs that informs them of their right to contact the IRS collection function for assistance if they believe they cannot pay their tax debts without incurring economic hardship. The IRS could also use it to screen out these taxpayers from automated collection treatments such as the Federal Payment Levy Program, selection for referral to private collection agencies, or passport certification, unless and until the IRS has made direct personal contact with the taxpayer to give them an opportunity to substantiate their financial information.

At the time Congress enacted statutory protections for financially vulnerable taxpayers from collection actions, the IRS did not have the technological capability to proactively identify at-risk taxpayers through automation. Probably for that reason, the law allows the IRS to take collection actions without considering a taxpayer's financial condition and places the burden on affected taxpayers to raise economic hardship and ask for relief.

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2 This estimate allows two vehicle ownership expenses for married taxpayers filing joint returns. TAS published a study on the feasibility of using an algorithm to identify taxpayers at risk of economic hardship in the National Taxpayer Advocate 2020 Annual Report to Congress. This study used a more conservative estimate of ALEs, allowing only one vehicle ownership expense. See National Taxpayer Advocate 2020 Annual Report to Congress 249 (TAS Research Study: *The IRS Can Systemically Identify Taxpayers at Risk of Economic Hardship and Screen Them Before They Enter Into Installment Agreements They Cannot Afford*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ARC20\\_TRRS\\_EconomicHardship.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ARC20_TRRS_EconomicHardship.pdf).

3 National Taxpayer Advocate 2020 Annual Report to Congress 249, 257 (TAS Research Study: *The IRS Can Systemically Identify Taxpayers at Risk of Economic Hardship and Screen Them Before They Enter Into Installment Agreements They Cannot Afford*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ARC20\\_TRRS\\_EconomicHardship.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ARC20_TRRS_EconomicHardship.pdf).

4 The IRS has internal data available to provide an initial indicator of whether a taxpayer may be at risk of economic hardship, but it uses this information in very limited circumstances. For instance, a Reduced User Fee Indicator is used to determine whether taxpayers entering into IAs are eligible for a reduced or waived user fee, but the indicator is not used to screen for potential economic hardship. See Internal Revenue Manual 5.14.1.2(11), *Installment Agreements and Taxpayer Rights* (July 2, 2024), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-014-001r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-014-001r).

But today, the IRS can identify taxpayers at risk of economic hardship with a high degree of accuracy. It is not in anyone's interest for the IRS to collect from taxpayers when doing so will leave them without funds to pay basic living expenses for themselves and their families.

The IRS can implement an economic hardship screen on its own, but to date, it has declined to do so. For that reason, we are recommending that Congress provide direction.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Direct the IRS to implement an algorithm that will enable it to (i) identify taxpayers at high risk of economic hardship; (ii) ask questions of taxpayers who contact the IRS regarding a balance due to identify those at risk of hardship; (iii) alert taxpayers at risk of economic hardship who seek to enter into streamlined IAs online of the resources available to them; (iv) determine whether to exclude taxpayers' debts from automated collection treatments such as the Federal Payment Levy Program, the private debt collection program, and passport certification; and (v) possibly rank cases for collection priority.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For legislative language that would partially implement this recommendation, see Improving IRS Customer Service Act, S. 5280, 118th Cong. § 5 (2024).

**Legislative Recommendation #16****Provide That “an Opportunity to Dispute” an IRS-Determined Tax Liability in a Collection Due Process Hearing Includes an Opportunity to Dispute Such Liability in the U.S. Tax Court****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The IRS takes collection actions against some taxpayers who had their tax liability determined by the IRS but did not have an opportunity to challenge the existence or amount of that liability in the U.S. Tax Court. These taxpayers generally have no alternative but to pay the tax the IRS says they owe and then seek a refund in a different federal court, an option that many taxpayers cannot afford and that imposes additional burden.
- *Solution:* Allow taxpayers to challenge the existence or amount of an IRS-determined tax liability at a Collection Due Process (CDP) hearing in cases where they did not have a prior opportunity to dispute the liability in Tax Court.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC §§ 6320(b) and 6330(b) provide taxpayers with the right to request an independent review of a Notice of Federal Tax Lien or a proposed levy action. The review is provided through a CDP hearing conducted by the IRS Independent Office of Appeals (Appeals) and is subject to review by the Tax Court, which is generally the only prepayment judicial forum in which taxpayers may resolve their disputes with the IRS. In most cases, the existence and amount of a tax liability has already been conclusively determined by this point under procedures that gave the taxpayer an opportunity to seek Tax Court review of the IRS’s determination. Thus, the purpose of the CDP hearing is typically to determine whether taxpayers qualify for collection alternatives (*e.g.*, an offer in compromise or an installment agreement) based on their ability to pay.

In certain circumstances, however, taxpayers are not given an opportunity to seek Tax Court review of the IRS’s liability determination prior to a CDP hearing. Where a taxpayer “did not receive any statutory notice of deficiency for such tax liability or did not otherwise have an opportunity to dispute such tax liability,” IRC § 6330(c)(2)(B) provides that the taxpayer may dispute the existence or amount of the underlying tax liability at a CDP hearing.<sup>1</sup>

The IRS and the courts interpret IRC § 6330(c)(2)(B) and the Treasury regulations under IRC §§ 6320 and 6330 restrictively. They take the position that a taxpayer does not have a right to dispute the existence or amount of a liability if the taxpayer had a prior opportunity for a conference with Appeals, even if the taxpayer had no prior opportunity for Tax Court review of the liability and even if no subsequent Tax Court review of the Appeals determination is available.<sup>2</sup> For example, one court has held that a taxpayer who did not receive a notice of deficiency was not permitted to dispute his underlying liability in a CDP hearing

1 IRC §§ 6320(c), 6330(c)(2)(B). The phrase “underlying tax liability” includes the tax deficiency, any penalties, additions to tax, and statutory interest. See *Katz v. Comm’r*, 115 T.C. 329, 339 (2000).

2 See Treas. Reg. §§ 301.6320-1(e)(3), Q&A-E2, 301.6330-1(e)(3), Q&A-E2; *Lewis v. Comm’r*, 128 T.C. 48, 61 (2007); *James v. Comm’r*, 850 F.3d 160 (4th Cir. 2017); *Keller Tank Servs. II, Inc. v. Comm’r*, 854 F.3d 1178 (10th Cir. 2017); *Our Country Home Enters., Inc. v. Comm’r*, 855 F.3d 773 (7th Cir. 2017). Additionally, at least one Court of Appeals has held that IRC § 6330(c)(4)(A) provides an independent basis for denying a merits hearing in the CDP process if a prior merits hearing occurred. *James*, 850 F.3d 160.

because the taxpayer previously sought to resolve the tax liability through audit reconsideration.<sup>3</sup> Because the underlying liability was not at issue in the CDP hearing, the taxpayer was precluded from disputing the underlying liability in the Tax Court proceeding.<sup>4</sup>

IRC § 6330(c)(4)(A) provides, in part, that a taxpayer is precluded from raising an issue during a CDP hearing if the issue was raised in a previous administrative hearing. This restriction has been interpreted to mean that if a taxpayer had a prior hearing at Appeals with respect to the liability, the issue of the liability cannot be raised at the CDP hearing, even if the taxpayer had no prior opportunity for Tax Court review of the liability.<sup>5</sup>

Mere notification of the right to request an Appeals conference may prevent the taxpayer from disputing the tax liability in a CDP hearing. For example, the IRS assesses some penalties without issuing a notice of deficiency.<sup>6</sup> The IRS notifies the taxpayer of the proposed penalty by sending a letter or notice. Whether or not the taxpayer requests or receives a conference with Appeals in response to the letter, the taxpayer will not be permitted to dispute the merits of the liability at a CDP hearing or in the Tax Court. To obtain judicial review of the underlying liability, the taxpayer generally must pay the full amount of the tax liability and seek a refund in a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.<sup>7</sup>

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

The value of CDP proceedings is undermined when taxpayers who have never had an opportunity to dispute their underlying IRS-determined liability in the Tax Court are precluded from doing so during their CDP hearing, and these taxpayers have no alternative but to pay the tax and then seek a refund, an option that not all taxpayers can afford. The National Taxpayer Advocate believes that judicial and administrative interpretations limiting a taxpayer's ability to challenge the IRS's liability determination in a CDP hearing are inconsistent with Congress's intent when it enacted CDP procedures. Compared to the burden the current rules impose on taxpayers, allowing more taxpayers to dispute their tax liabilities in CDP hearings will better protect taxpayer rights without placing undue administrative burden on the IRS or the Tax Court.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend IRC § 6330(c)(2)(B) to allow taxpayers to raise challenges to the existence or amount of an underlying IRS-determined tax liability at a CDP hearing for any tax period if the taxpayer did not receive a valid notice of deficiency for such liability, or in a non-deficiency case, if the taxpayer did not have an opportunity to dispute the liability in the U.S. Tax Court.
- Clarify that IRC § 6330(c)(4)(A) applies only to collection issues and not to liability issues, which are addressed exclusively in IRC § 6330(c)(2)(B).

3 *Lander v. Comm'r*, 154 T.C. 104 (2020). Audit reconsiderations are not subject to Tax Court review.

4 See Treas. Reg. § 301.6330-1(f)(2), Q&A-F3.

5 *Our Country Home Enters., Inc. v. Comm'r*, 855 F.3d 773, 792-93 (7th Cir. 2017); *Keller Tank Servs. II, Inc. v. Comm'r*, 854 F.3d 1178, 1199-1200 (10th Cir. 2017) (both cases holding that a taxpayer who challenged an IRC § 6707A penalty at an Appeals hearing prior to assessment was precluded from raising the issue in a CDP hearing); Treas. Reg. §§ 301.6320-1(e)(3), Q&A-E2, 301.6330-1(e)(3), Q&A-E2.

6 These "assessable" penalties are primarily found in IRC §§ 6671 through 6720C. The IRS sometimes assesses these penalties systemically (i.e., automatically by computer rather than manually during an audit). See, e.g., Internal Revenue Manual 21.8.2.20.2(1), Form 5471 Penalties Systemically Assessed From Late-Filed Form 1120 Series or Form 1065 (Oct. 1, 2024), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part21/irm\\_21-008-002r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part21/irm_21-008-002r).

7 Under *Flora v. United States*, 362 U.S. 145 (1960), a taxpayer must have "fully paid" the assessment before filing a refund suit. One exception to the full payment rule applies to "divisible" taxes.

**Legislative Recommendation #17****Prohibit the IRS From Withholding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Portion of a Taxpayer's Refund to Satisfy Federal Tax Liabilities****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Taxpayers who qualify for social welfare benefits like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) generally are low-income and rely on these benefits to pay their basic living expenses. When a taxpayer eligible for the EITC has an outstanding federal tax liability, the IRS ordinarily will withhold the EITC to satisfy the tax liability, potentially leaving the taxpayer without sufficient funds to pay expenses. Reducing the amount of EITC a taxpayer receives undermines the purpose of this anti-poverty program.
- *Solution:* Prohibit the IRS from withholding the EITC portion of a taxpayer's refund to satisfy federal tax liabilities.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6402(a) generally authorizes the IRS to offset (*i.e.*, withhold) a taxpayer's refund and apply it to satisfy a prior-year federal tax liability, but it does not require the IRS to do so.<sup>1</sup> If a taxpayer can demonstrate that they will experience an economic hardship if the IRS offsets their refund, the IRS will typically "bypass" the offset (*i.e.*, pay the refund), as long as the request is made within a specific timeframe. This is referred to as an "offset bypass refund" (OBR).<sup>2</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, the IRS exercised its discretion to pay refunds generated by Recovery Rebate Credits (RRCs) to all eligible taxpayers in full, without reduction to satisfy outstanding federal tax debts.<sup>3</sup>

The EITC is a refundable credit for low-income working individuals and families.<sup>4</sup> It is claimed on a tax return and is included in the computations that determine whether a taxpayer is entitled to receive a refund and, if so, the amount of the refund.

1 *Kalb v. United States*, 505 F.2d 506, 509 (2d Cir. 1974). The IRS is required to offset a taxpayer's refund to pay down certain liabilities, such as non-tax federal debts, past-due child support, and state income tax and unemployment compensation debts. See IRC § 6402(c), (d).

2 Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) 21.4.6.5.7.1, Offset Bypass Refund (OBR) (Oct. 1, 2024), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part21/irm\\_21-004-006r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part21/irm_21-004-006r).

3 In the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Congress enacted IRC § 6428, providing for RRCs, payable in advance, which would not be offset to satisfy outstanding liabilities other than past-due child support obligations. See Pub. L. No. 116-136, § 2201(a), (d)(1)-(3), 134 Stat. 281, 338 (2020). In the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Congress enacted IRC § 6428A, providing for additional RRCs, and amended section 2201 of the CARES Act to provide that only the portion of the RRCs that were paid as advance refunds were exempt from offset to satisfy outstanding liabilities other than past-due child support obligations. See Pub. L. No. 116-260, §§ 272(a), 273(b)(1), 134 Stat. 1182, 1965 (2020). At TAS's urging, the IRS exercised its discretion under IRC § 6402(a) to not offset RRCs, whether received in advance or claimed on a tax return, to satisfy outstanding tax liabilities, effective for returns filed on or after March 18, 2021. See, e.g., IRS Fact Sheet, FS-2021-17, IRS Updates 2020 Recovery Rebate Credit Frequently Asked Questions, Q&A-E2 (Dec. 2021), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/taxpros/fs-2021-17.pdf>; IRS Fact Sheet, FS-2022-04, IRS Issues Frequently Asked Questions to Assist Those Claiming the 2021 Recovery Rebate Credit, Q&A-F2 (Jan. 2022), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/taxpros/fs-2022-04.pdf>.

4 IRC § 32. The Supreme Court has stated: "The earned income credit was enacted to reduce the disincentive to work caused by the imposition of social security taxes on earned income ... and to provide relief for low-income families hurt by rising food and energy prices." *Sorenson v. Sec'y of Treasury*, 475 U.S. 851, 864 (1986).

The Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996 (DCIA) requires federal agencies to offset certain federal payments to collect outstanding non-tax debts owed to the United States.<sup>5</sup> However, the amount subject to offset is statutorily limited in some instances, and payments made pursuant to “means-tested” anti-poverty programs, such as Supplemental Security Income and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, are exempt from offset when exemption is requested by the head of the agency administering the program.<sup>6</sup> In substance, the EITC is a means-tested benefit, but it does not meet the DCIA definition of that term.<sup>7</sup>

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

Like other anti-poverty programs, Congress created the EITC to provide financial support for low-income individuals and families, and to reduce poverty. The average adjusted gross income of taxpayers who received the EITC for tax year 2022 was \$21,020.<sup>8</sup> If a low-income taxpayer has an unpaid tax debt, however, the IRS may offset the taxpayer’s refund – including the portion generated by the EITC – to satisfy the debt. Withholding EITC benefits undermines the EITC’s anti-poverty objective.

Taxpayers can request an OBR for their refund – including the EITC portion – but the timeframe for making the request is narrow. The IRS must approve an OBR between the date the return is filed and the date the IRS assesses the tax shown on the return. This period is approximately ten to 20 days when a return is filed electronically. Additionally, the IRS does not widely publicize its OBR program. As a result, many taxpayers are unaware they can obtain an OBR or learn about the option after it is too late. In fiscal year 2024 through June, for example, just 1,160 taxpayers received OBRs.<sup>9</sup>

The IRS has exercised its discretion to not offset tax benefits to satisfy past-due federal tax liabilities in limited cases, but it has not adopted a general policy of protecting EITC refunds from offset. Consistent with congressional recognition reflected in the DCIA that offsets may impose economic hardships on recipients of federal benefits, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommends Congress prohibit the IRS from offsetting the portion of a taxpayer’s refund attributable to the EITC.

To be clear, TAS is *not* recommending that the IRS release the full amount of any refund subject to offset – just the portion of the refund that is attributable to the EITC. Programming would be straightforward, rendering it easily administrable.<sup>10</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6402(a) to prohibit the Secretary from offsetting the EITC portion of a taxpayer’s refund to satisfy prior-year tax liabilities.

5 See Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996, Omnibus Consolidated Rescissions and Appropriations Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-134, § 31001, 110 Stat. 1321, 1321-358 (1996) (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 3716). The offsets are carried out through the Treasury Offset Program.

6 31 U.S.C. § 3716(c)(3)(B). “Means-tested programs” are those which base eligibility on a determination that the income and/or assets of the beneficiary are inadequate to provide the beneficiary with an adequate standard of living without program assistance. 31 C.F.R. § 285.5(e)(7)(i). The Secretary of the Treasury has the discretion to exempt payments made under programs that are not means-tested, when so requested by the payment agency. 31 U.S.C. § 3716(c)(3)(B); 31 C.F.R. § 285.5(e)(7)(ii).

7 See, e.g., Democratic Staff of H. Comm. on the Budget, *What You Need to Know About Means-Tested Entitlements* (May 1, 2017), <https://democrats-budget.house.gov/publications/report/what-you-need-know-about-means-tested-entitlements>; Congressional Budget Office, *Federal Means-Tested Programs and Tax Credits – Infographic* (Feb. 11, 2013), <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/43935>.

8 IRS, Compliance Data Warehouse (CDW), Individual Return Transaction File (June 27, 2024).

9 IRS, CDW, Individual Master File Transaction History table (June 27, 2024).

10 The Section of Taxation of the American Bar Association (ABA) has also advocated for a prohibition against offsetting the refunds of EITC recipients. ABA, *Proposals for Improvements in Taxpayer Service* (Apr. 5, 2022), <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/taxation/policy/2022/040522comments.pdf>; ABA, *Comments Regarding Review of Regulatory and other Relief to Support Taxpayers during COVID-19 Pandemic* (Jan. 15, 2021), <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/taxation/policy/2021/011521comments.pdf>.

**Legislative Recommendation #18****Eliminate Installment Agreement User Fees for Low-Income Taxpayers and Those Paying by Direct Debit****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Taxpayers who cannot pay their tax liabilities on time may make monthly payments through an installment agreement (IA). The IRS generally charges these taxpayers a “user fee” to manage IA payment plans. Although user fees are modest, they may discourage some taxpayers from applying for IAs and settling their tax liabilities voluntarily.
- *Solution:* Require the IRS to waive the user fee for IAs with taxpayers whose adjusted gross incomes are equal to or less than 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level and taxpayers who enter into direct debit IAs (DDIAs).

**PRESENT LAW**

In cases where a taxpayer is unable to pay the full amount of their tax liability in a single lump sum, IRC § 6159(a) authorizes the IRS to enter into an IA under which the taxpayer will pay the liability in monthly installments. A taxpayer can apply for an IA on paper, over the phone, or in person (these three are considered “Regular IA origination”), or by using an online payment agreement (OPA).

Under 31 U.S.C. § 9701, the IRS is authorized to set user fees by regulation.<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to Treas. Reg. § 300.1, the IRS currently charges \$178 for entering into regular IAs and \$69 for entering into OPAs.<sup>2</sup> If a taxpayer authorizes the IRS to direct debit monthly payments from a bank account, the fee is reduced to \$107 for regular IAs and \$22 for OPAs. These fees are designed to enable the agency to recover the full costs of administering IAs.

For low-income taxpayers – those with adjusted gross incomes at or below 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level – Treas. Reg. § 300.1 caps the IA fee at \$43.<sup>3</sup> In addition, IRC § 6159(f)(2)(A) waives the fee for low-income taxpayers who enter into DDIAs. Low-income taxpayers who cannot enter into DDIAs (*e.g.*, because they do not have a bank account) must pay the \$43 fee. If they make all payments required under the IA, IRC § 6159(f)(2)(B) requires the IRS to reimburse the amount of the fee. In 2018, Congress amended IRC § 6159(f)(1) to prohibit the IRS from increasing the IA user fees.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Taxpayers who are low-income and cannot afford to pay their tax bills are, almost by definition, experiencing a financial hardship. Requiring them to pay upfront user fees in addition to their tax liabilities, which include interest charges and may include penalties, is likely to discourage some from entering into IAs. In addition,

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1 See also OFF. OF MGMT. & BUDGET (OMB), CIRCULAR NO. A-25 (revised), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Circular-025.pdf> (establishing a general policy that agencies should charge user fees “against each identifiable recipient for special benefits derived from Federal activities beyond those received by the general public.”).

2 The IRS fee for OPAs is lower than the amount prescribed by regulations. Treas. Reg. § 300.1(b)(2) states: “The fee is \$149 for entering into online payment agreements on or after January 1, 2017, ....” TAS has been advised that the IRS Office of Chief Counsel has initiated a project to amend the regulation to match the current fee in the Internal Revenue Manual (IRM). IRM 5.14.1.2(10), Installment Agreements and Taxpayer Rights (July 2, 2024), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-014-001r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-014-001r).

3 In determining a taxpayer’s eligibility for these low-income provisions, the IRS determines adjusted gross income based on the taxpayer’s last filed tax return.

the cost of processing OPAs and DDIAAs is so minimal that charging a user fee could cost the government more in lost tax revenue and increased enforcement expenses than the user fee recovers.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6159 to require the IRS to waive the user fee for all IAs with taxpayers whose adjusted gross incomes<sup>4</sup> are at or below 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level and for all DDIAAs.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Collectibility determinations should be based on the taxpayer's current financial situation – not the taxpayer's financial situation at the time the liability was incurred. The National Taxpayer Advocate supports the use of a taxpayer's current income for IA user fee waiver determinations when adjusted gross income is either unavailable or not reflective of the taxpayer's current financial situation. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see *Require the IRS to Consider a Taxpayer's Current Income When Determining Whether to Waive or Reimburse an Installment Agreement User Fee*, *infra*.

5 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Affordable Payment Agreements for Taxpayers Act, H.R. 2675, 118th Cong. § 2 (2023).

**Legislative Recommendation #19****Improve Offer in Compromise Program Accessibility by Repealing the Upfront Payment Requirements****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Financially struggling taxpayers who cannot afford to pay their tax liabilities in full may apply for an offer in compromise (OIC). Under an OIC, the IRS agrees to accept less than full payment in satisfaction of the debt. Currently, taxpayers are required to include non-refundable partial payments with their OIC applications. The Treasury Department has acknowledged that the partial payment requirement may substantially reduce access to the OIC program and has estimated that repealing the requirement would raise revenue.
- *Solution:* Repeal the requirements that taxpayers include partial payments with OIC applications.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7122(a) authorizes the IRS to settle a tax debt by accepting an OIC. According to Policy Statement 5-100, the IRS will “accept an offer in compromise when it is unlikely that the tax liability can be collected in full and the amount offered reasonably reflects collection potential.”<sup>1</sup> Taxpayers whose offers are accepted must file and pay their taxes for the next five years, as stated on IRS Form 656, Offer in Compromise. If they fail to remain in compliance for the five-year period, the IRS may seek to collect the amounts it compromised.

IRC § 7122(c)(1)(A) requires a taxpayer who would like the IRS to consider a “lump-sum” offer – payable in five or fewer installments – to include a nonrefundable partial payment of 20 percent of the amount of the offer with the application. IRC § 7122(c)(1)(B) requires a taxpayer who would like the IRS to consider a “periodic payment” offer – an offer payable in six or more installments – to include the first proposed installment with the application and to continue to make installment payments while the IRS is considering it. In addition to these upfront partial payments, Treas. Reg. § 300.3 requires that most offer applications include a \$205 user fee. IRC § 7122(c)(3) provides that taxpayers with low incomes (*i.e.*, taxpayers with adjusted gross incomes for the most recent tax year, or taxpayers with household gross monthly incomes multiplied by 12 months, that do not exceed 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level guidelines) are not subject to the user fee or the partial payment requirement.<sup>2</sup> They may apply for a waiver on Form 656.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

By accepting an offer, the IRS often collects money it would not otherwise collect and may convert a noncompliant taxpayer into a compliant one by requiring the taxpayer, as a condition of the agreement, to timely file returns and pay taxes for the following five years. The Treasury Department’s General Explanations of the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2017 Revenue Proposals acknowledged the benefit of offers and proposed to repeal the partial payment requirement, explaining that the requirement “may substantially reduce access to the offer in compromise program [and] [r]educing access to the offer-in-compromise program makes it

<sup>1</sup> Internal Revenue Manual 1.2.1.6.17, Policy Statement 5-100, Offers Will Be Accepted (Jan. 30, 1992), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part1/irm\\_01-002-001](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part1/irm_01-002-001).

<sup>2</sup> See also Treas. Reg. § 300.3(b)(ii), (iii).

more difficult and costly to obtain the collectable portion of existing tax liabilities.”<sup>3</sup> The Treasury Department estimated that repealing the requirement would raise revenue.<sup>4</sup>

A 2007 TAS study found that taxpayers above the low-income threshold were no better able to afford to make partial payments than those below it and that those below it frequently did not obtain a waiver.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, a 2005 Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) report found that when the IRS first imposed a user fee (it was \$150 in 2003), OIC submissions declined by more than 20 percent among taxpayers at every income level, including those who were eligible for a fee waiver.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, after the partial payment requirement was imposed, there was a 26 percent decrease in submitted offers and only a slight increase in the offer acceptance rate, suggesting that higher upfront costs deterred many taxpayers from submitting acceptable offers. Thus, upfront payments such as the user fee and the partial payment requirement likely reduce collections and increase enforcement costs.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 7122(c) to remove the requirement that taxpayers include a partial payment with offer applications and to provide that any user fee that is imposed will not be required as an upfront payment but rather will be collected out of amounts otherwise due on accepted offers.<sup>7</sup>

3 Dep’t of the Treasury, *General Explanations of the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2017 Revenue Proposals* 220 (Feb. 2016) (Revise Offer-in-Compromise Application Rules), <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/131/General-Explanations-FY2017.pdf>.

4 In the past, the IRS expressed concern that repealing the partial payment requirement or limiting the user fee might have the effect of increasing the number of frivolous offers. The tax code discourages frivolous submissions by imposing a penalty of \$5,000 on any person who submits a frivolous OIC application. See IRC § 6702(b).

5 National Taxpayer Advocate 2007 Annual Report to Congress vol. 2, at 76 (*Effect of Tax Increase and Prevention Reconciliation Act of 2005 on IRS Offer in Compromise Program*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/arc\\_2007\\_vol\\_2.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/arc_2007_vol_2.pdf).

6 TIGTA, Ref. No. 2005-30-096, *The Implementation of the Offer in Compromise Application Fee Reduced the Volume of Offers Filed by Taxpayers at All Income Levels* (2005).

7 For legislative language generally consistent with the recommendation to repeal the partial payment requirement, see Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act of 2023, S. 1177 and H.R. 2681, 118th Cong. § 17 (2023); Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act of 2022, H.R. 7033, 117th Cong. § 17 (2022). We recommend that the language in these bills be modified to avoid eliminating the exception to user fees for low-income taxpayers in IRC § 7122(c)(3). For additional background, see, e.g., National Taxpayer Advocate 2006 Annual Report to Congress 507 (Legislative Recommendation: *Improve Offer in Compromise Program Accessibility*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2006\\_arc\\_section2\\_v2.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2006_arc_section2_v2.pdf).

**Legislative Recommendation #20****Require the IRS to Consider a Taxpayer's Current Income When Determining Whether to Waive or Reimburse an Installment Agreement User Fee****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Financially struggling taxpayers who apply for an installment agreement (IA) are ordinarily required to pay a user fee, but the law requires the IRS to waive the fee, or in some cases to reimburse the fee, if a taxpayer's adjusted gross income (AGI) is at or below 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Under current law, the IRS determines whether to waive the IA user fee based solely on the taxpayer's most recently filed tax return, even if the return was filed years ago and does not accurately reflect the taxpayer's *current* financial condition.
- *Solution:* Require the IRS to consider the taxpayer's *current* financial condition in determining his or her eligibility for a waiver or reimbursement of the IA user fee.

**PRESENT LAW**

A taxpayer who is unable to pay a federal income tax liability in full may apply for an IA or an offer in compromise (OIC). For IAs, IRC § 6159(f)(2) provides that the user fee shall not be imposed, or in some cases will be refunded, for any taxpayer with an AGI that does not exceed 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level "as determined for the most recent year for which such information is available."<sup>1</sup> For OICs, IRC § 7122(c)(3) similarly provides that the user fee shall not apply to any taxpayer with an AGI that does not exceed 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level "as determined for the most recent taxable year for which such information is available."

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Although the statutory provisions governing user fees for IAs and OICs are nearly identical, IRS policy in some cases treats taxpayers applying for IA fee waivers less favorably than taxpayers applying for OIC fee waivers. In calculating a taxpayer's eligibility to have an IA user fee waived, the IRS determines AGI by relying solely on the taxpayer's last filed tax return, even if the return was filed several years ago and does not accurately reflect the taxpayer's current ability to pay.<sup>2</sup>

As a general matter, tax *liability* determinations are made for the tax period at issue. By contrast, tax *collectability* determinations are made based on the taxpayer's current financial condition or, in certain circumstances, on the taxpayer's future collection potential. User fee waiver determinations should similarly be based on whether the taxpayer can afford to pay the user fee today. Relying on an old tax return to make the determination often will not produce an accurate result. If, for example, a taxpayer last filed a tax return

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1 Where a low-income taxpayer pays an IA by direct debit from their bank account, IRC § 6159(f)(2)(A) requires the IRS to waive the IA user fee. Where a low-income taxpayer does not make payments by direct debit (perhaps because the taxpayer does not have a bank account), the IRS requires the taxpayer to pay a \$43 user fee, and IRC § 6159(f)(2)(B) requires the IRS to reimburse the taxpayer upon completion of the IA. The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends the fee be waived for all low-income taxpayers. See *Eliminate Installment Agreement User Fees for Low-Income Taxpayers and Those Paying by Direct Debit*, *supra*.

2 See Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) 5.14.9.10(5), Installment Agreement User Fees: Authority and General Information (Oct. 7, 2019), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-014-009](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-014-009) (providing that for IAs filed after April 10, 2018, a taxpayer's AGI should be considered "as reported on their most recently filed tax return").

for 2018 and has not had a filing requirement since that time, considering only the taxpayer's 2018 return will enable the IRS to determine whether the taxpayer could have afforded to pay the user fee based on their 2018 income, but that is irrelevant to whether he or she can afford to pay the user fee today. The taxpayer's financial condition may have improved or deteriorated significantly in the intervening years.

In contrast to the IRS's policy of relying solely on the taxpayer's last filed return to make low-income fee waiver determinations for purposes of IAs, the IRS's policy for making low-income fee waiver determinations for OICs is more flexible. If the taxpayer does not qualify for a fee waiver based on the last-filed return for purposes of an OIC application, the IRS will determine whether the taxpayer qualifies for a fee waiver based on the taxpayer's current income and household size.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the OIC review process considers more current information when the taxpayer does not qualify based solely on a previous year's AGI, whereas the IA review process does not.

To protect taxpayers' *right to a fair and just tax system*, user fee waiver determinations for IAs and OICs should be consistent and based on the taxpayer's current financial condition to the maximum extent possible. We recommend Congress clarify the law to require the IRS to consider a taxpayer's current income when determining eligibility for the IA user fee waiver (or reimbursement) if no recent return has been filed (*i.e.*, if the taxpayer was not required to file a recent tax return or if the taxpayer indicates his or her financial condition has worsened).<sup>4</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6159(f) to require the Secretary to consider a taxpayer's current income in addition to the AGI on their last-filed return when determining whether to waive or reimburse an IA user fee.

3 IRM 5.8.2.4.1(7), Determining Processability (June 14, 2024), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-008-002](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-008-002). A similar issue arises in the context of the private debt collection program authorized by IRC § 6306. That statute provides that the account of a taxpayer with AGI at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level may not be assigned to a private collection agency, and it directs the IRS to make the AGI determination based on "the most recent taxable year for which such information is available." The IRS currently will look for returns going back up to ten years – which clearly do not reflect the taxpayer's current income – but will not consider information reporting documents or other current income information. For our recommendation to change that approach along the same lines as this recommendation, see *Revise the Private Debt Collection Rules to More Accurately Identify and Protect Taxpayers With Incomes Below 200 Percent of the Federal Poverty Level*, *infra*.

4 We believe existing law provides the IRS with this authority, but the IRS has not agreed. The IRS has stated in the past that it can only determine "gross income" and not "adjusted gross income" (the statutory basis for a waiver) from information reporting documents. We believe the agency can implement a common-sense alternative method to assess a taxpayer's current financial condition for purposes of the IA user fee waiver since that is the point of the statute, and the fact that the IRS is doing exactly that in the context of OIC fee waivers shows its position is not applied consistently.

**Legislative Recommendation #21****Modify the Requirement That the Office of Chief Counsel Review Certain Offers in Compromise****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The IRS Office of Chief Counsel is currently required to review and provide a legal opinion for every accepted offer in compromise (OIC) where the amount of unpaid tax is \$50,000 or more, even though the IRS determines whether to accept an OIC primarily based on an analysis of the taxpayer's financial condition and very few OICs present significant legal issues. This requirement delays OIC processing and diverts Counsel attorneys from performing their core legal work.
- *Solution:* Require Counsel review of OICs only in cases that Counsel determines present significant legal issues.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7122 authorizes the Secretary to enter into an agreement with a taxpayer that settles the taxpayer's tax liabilities for less than the full amount owed, provided the taxpayer's case has not been referred to the Department of Justice. Such an agreement is known as an OIC. Treas. Reg. § 301.7122-1(b) provides that the IRS may compromise liabilities to the extent there is doubt as to liability or doubt as to collectibility, or to promote effective tax administration. The regulations further define these terms and describe instances when compromise is appropriate.

IRC § 7122(b) requires the Treasury Department's General Counsel to review and provide an opinion for accepted OICs in all criminal cases and in all civil cases where the amount of unpaid tax assessed (including any interest, additional amount, addition to tax, and assessable penalty) is \$50,000 or more. This authority is exercised by the IRS Office of Chief Counsel.<sup>1</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

The IRS receives tens of thousands of OIC applications every year. The overwhelming majority are submitted based on doubt as to collectibility (*i.e.*, the taxpayer says they cannot afford to pay the debt in full). In these cases, the IRS decides whether to accept an OIC primarily by performing a financial analysis that compares the taxpayer's ability to pay (based on income and assets) with the taxpayer's allowable living expenses. Currently, the IRS also must verify that the legal and IRS policy requirements for compromise are met prior to proposing acceptance, even though very few OICs present significant legal issues that require Office of Chief Counsel involvement. The time Counsel employees spend reviewing and learning the facts of every criminal OIC case and every civil OIC case where the amount of unpaid tax assessed is \$50,000 or more creates significant delays in OIC processing and is often duplicative of work the IRS has already performed. It also requires a significant commitment of legal resources on the part of the IRS. The Office of Chief Counsel reports that it spends over six thousand hours each year reviewing OICs.<sup>2</sup> Taxpayers would be better served if the IRS allocated those resources elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> See Internal Revenue Manual 8.23.4.3.3, Counsel Review of Acceptance Recommendations (Apr. 7, 2022), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part8/irm\\_08-023-004](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part8/irm_08-023-004).

<sup>2</sup> Emails from IRS Office of Chief Counsel (June 14, 2024; Nov. 29, 2021; Sept. 1, 2020; and Aug. 9, 2019) (on file with TAS).

In addition, delays in OIC processing may impede a taxpayer's ability to make other financial decisions while awaiting a response and may even jeopardize the taxpayer's ability to pay the amount offered if their financial circumstances deteriorate while the OIC is awaiting Counsel review.

The National Taxpayer Advocate believes the OIC process would be improved if Congress repeals the blanket requirement that Counsel review all OICs in civil cases where the unpaid tax assessed is \$50,000 or more and replace it with language authorizing the Secretary to determine when an opinion of the Treasury Department's General Counsel, or the Counsel's delegate, is required with respect to an OIC.<sup>3</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 7122(b) to repeal the requirement that Counsel review all OICs in civil cases where the amount of unpaid tax assessed (including any interest, additional amount, addition to tax, or assessable penalty) is \$50,000 or more and replace it with language authorizing the Secretary to determine when an opinion of the Treasury Department's General Counsel, or the Counsel's delegate, is required with respect to an OIC.<sup>4</sup>

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3 The Treasury Department has made a similar proposal. See Dep't of the Treasury, *General Explanations of the Administration's Fiscal Year 2025 Revenue Proposals* 177 (Modify the Requirement That General Counsel Review Certain Offers in Compromise), <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/131/General-Explanations-FY2025.pdf>.

4 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see, e.g., Taxpayer Bill of Rights Enhancement Act of 2017, S. 1793, 115th Cong. § 303 (2017); Taxpayer Bill of Rights Enhancement Act of 2015, S. 1578, 114th Cong. § 403 (2015).

**Legislative Recommendation #22****Require the IRS to Mail Notices at Least Quarterly to Taxpayers With Delinquent Tax Liabilities****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The IRS is required to send billing notices to taxpayers with tax debts once a year. Private businesses typically send billing notices more frequently, often monthly. By sending infrequent billing notices, the IRS receives fewer payments from taxpayers, and as a result, more taxpayers face aggressive IRS collection actions such as levies and liens.
- *Solution:* Require the IRS to send billing notices to taxpayers with tax debts at least quarterly.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7524 requires the IRS to send taxpayers with delinquent accounts a written notice that sets forth the amount of the tax delinquency as of the date of the notice and to do so “[n]ot less often than annually.”

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

The IRS satisfies the IRC § 7524 requirement by sending taxpayers with delinquent accounts Notice CP-71, Reminder Notice, once a year. However, the infrequency of IRS billing notices leaves collectible revenue uncollected and subjects taxpayers who would make payments if they received more frequent reminders to additional penalties and interest charges, along with harsher consequences such as wage garnishments, bank account levies, and property liens.

Sending more frequent notices after the IRS’s initial notice stream would entail additional postage and processing costs. However, private sector businesses, including credit card issuers and retailers, face the same trade-off, and almost all such creditors send billing notices more frequently than once a year. Most send billing notices on at least a monthly basis. In other words, they have found that frequent notices generate more revenue, net of costs. Many individual and business taxpayers face financial challenges and prioritize paying the bills of creditors who are sending regular notices and are top of mind.

**RECOMMENDATION**

- Amend IRC § 7524 to require the IRS to notify taxpayers of delinquent tax liabilities at least quarterly.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Protecting Taxpayers Act, S. 3278, 115th Cong. § 201 (2018). As more taxpayers establish online accounts, the IRS will be able to transmit notices to taxpayers electronically rather than by traditional mail. For that reason, we are phrasing our recommendation broadly to allow that means of communication as an option.

## Legislative Recommendation #23

## Clarify When the Two-Year Period for Requesting Return of Levy Proceeds Begins

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* The IRS can return levy proceeds to a taxpayer in certain circumstances, or to a third party in the case of a wrongful levy if a request for return is made within two years from the “date of levy.” For paper levies, the date of levy is the date the notice of levy was served. For electronic levies, the IRS considers the date of levy to be the date on which it received the levy proceeds. This means parties subject to paper levies may not be able to recover funds that parties subject to electronic levies may recover.
- *Solution:* Allow the IRS to return levy proceeds if the funds were *received* by the IRS within the preceding two years, regardless of the date the original levy was *served*.

### PRESENT LAW

IRC § 6331 authorizes the IRS to levy on a taxpayer’s property and rights to property that exist at the time a levy is served in order to collect unpaid tax liabilities. The levy attaches to fixed and determinable obligations even if receipt of a payment arising from the obligation is deferred until a later date. A levy on a taxpayer’s salary or wages is continuous from the date the levy is first made until the levy is released.<sup>1</sup> A levy on certain specified federal payments such as Social Security benefits is also continuous<sup>2</sup> and is made electronically under the Federal Payment Levy Program (FPLP).<sup>3</sup>

IRC § 6343(b) authorizes the IRS to return money levied upon or money received from the sale of levied property (levy proceeds) to third parties when it determines the levy was wrongful if the third party requests the return within two years from the date of such levy.<sup>4</sup> The IRS may also return levy proceeds to taxpayers as if the property had been wrongfully levied upon when it determines one of the circumstances specified in IRC § 6343(d)(2) exists if the taxpayer requests the return within two years from the date of such levy.<sup>5</sup>

*Paper levies.* For paper levies delivered by hand or mail, the date of levy is the date the levy is delivered to the person in possession of the property.<sup>6</sup> In the case of a continuous levy under IRC § 6331(e), the date of levy is the date the notice of levy is first served by hand or by mail on the person in possession of the taxpayer’s salary or wages.<sup>7</sup>

1 IRC § 6331(e).

2 IRC § 6331(h).

3 The FPLP is an automated process used by the IRS to systemically levy federal payments owed to taxpayers. See IRS, Federal Payment Levy Program (Mar. 1, 2024), <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/federal-payment-levy-program>.

4 Under IRC § 7426(a)(1), a third party may bring a suit against the United States to recover amounts wrongfully levied. IRC § 6532(c) requires that a wrongful levy suit be brought within two years of the date of the levy unless a timely request for return of property was made pursuant to IRC § 6343(b).

5 IRC § 6343(b), (d) permits the IRS to return specific property levied upon at any time.

6 Treas. Reg. § 301.6331-1(c).

7 A continuous levy is issued via Form 668-W, Notice of Levy on Wages, Salary, and Other Income, and is generally a “paper levy”, which is defined as “either a manual or systemic levy on Form 668-A, or Form 668-W, that is prepared and issued by [a revenue officer].” This differs from an FPLP levy, which is an automated levy. Automated levies are “levies issued through the Automated Levy Programs.” They are transmitted electronically, and the proceeds are received electronically. IRM 5.11.5.1.6, Terms/Definitions/ Acronyms (June 13, 2018), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-011-005](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-011-005).

*Electronic levies.* For electronic levies through the FPLP, the IRS has adopted a policy to return all or a portion of the levy proceeds it received during the two-year period preceding the date of the request for return without regard to the date the initial levy was delivered.<sup>8</sup> While this policy is included in the Internal Revenue Manual (IRM), the IRM is simply a set of instructions to help IRS employees do their jobs. Neither the IRS nor taxpayers may rely on it in court.

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

IRS levies on assets, such as wages, pension benefits, annuities, or Social Security benefits, may result in multiple payments over many years. The IRS has the authority to return levy proceeds to a third party or to the taxpayer if the person requests the proceeds within two years of the date of levy under certain circumstances. If a party requests return of levy payments more than two years after the date of such levy, the IRS is not authorized to return the payments.

For paper levies, the IRS can return levy proceeds if the request for return is received within two years of the date that the levy was first served. In the case of FPLP levies under IRC § 6331(h), however, the IRM provides that the IRS can return a levied payment if the payment was made within the two-year period before the date of the request for return. These differing rules cause the IRS to treat similarly situated persons differently and infringe upon a third party or taxpayer's *right to a fair and just tax system*.

*Example:* Assume the IRS issues a continuous levy to a taxpayer's employer in Year One. In Year Three, the taxpayer's living expenses increase significantly due to large medical bills, and the levy causes an economic hardship for the taxpayer. In Year Four, the taxpayer asks the IRS to release the levy and return the levy proceeds that the IRS received during the time in which the taxpayer was experiencing economic hardship. The IRS is prohibited from returning the levy proceeds to the taxpayer because more than two years have elapsed since the date the levy was served.

Contrast this result with a taxpayer whose Social Security benefits are levied under the FPLP. The IRS may return up to the last two years of levy payments even if the request occurs more than two years after the FPLP levies began.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6343(b) to strike the term “date of such levy” and substitute “the date the Secretary received such amount.”

<sup>8</sup> See IRM 5.11.7.3.7(2), Returning FPLP Levy Proceeds (July 1, 2022), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-011-007r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-011-007r) (providing for return within two years from the date of such levy payment); IRM 5.19.9.3.7(5), Returning SITLP Payments (June 23, 2022), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-019-009r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-019-009r) (providing for return within two years from the date of such levy payment).

**Legislative Recommendation #24****Protect Retirement Funds From IRS Levies, Including So-Called “Voluntary” Levies, Absent Flagrant Conduct by a Taxpayer****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Congress has provided significant tax incentives to encourage Americans to save for retirement. Those policies reflect a recognition that almost all workers eventually retire and require retirement savings to pay their basic living expenses and that retirees who do not have savings often end up on costly public assistance programs. Those policies are undermined when the protections for retirement savings from levy are a matter of IRS policy, rather than codified in statutes, and the IRS allows taxpayers with tax debt to agree to “voluntary” levies on their retirement accounts.
- *Solution:* Prohibit the IRS from levying on retirement accounts unless a taxpayer has engaged in flagrant conduct.

**PRESENT LAW**

The IRS has wide discretion to exercise its levy authority. IRC § 6331(a) generally authorizes the IRS to “levy upon all property and rights to property” of the taxpayer, which includes retirement savings. Some property is exempt from levy pursuant to IRC § 6334.

The IRS has taken certain steps to protect retirement savings by requiring a specialized analysis prior to levy, with the steps laid out in the Internal Revenue Manual (IRM). One step is that the IRS has decided not to levy on the assets in a taxpayer’s retirement account unless it determines the taxpayer has engaged in flagrant conduct.<sup>1</sup> The IRM does not define the term “flagrant conduct” but does provide 13 examples of such conduct.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, the IRS modified the IRM to adopt procedures that allow taxpayers to request voluntary levies on retirement accounts. If a taxpayer requests a voluntary levy, the IRS bypasses the determination of flagrant conduct.<sup>3</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Congress has provided significant tax incentives to encourage taxpayers to save for retirement, and the same policy considerations support shielding retirement savings from IRS levies. Almost all workers eventually retire, and they require retirement savings to pay for basic living expenses. In addition, retirees who do not have sufficient savings are more likely to experience economic hardship and qualify for public assistance, which taxpayers pay to provide.

While the IRM contains procedures to protect retirement savings by requiring a specialized analysis prior to levy, these procedures do not provide sufficient taxpayer safeguards. Since the 2017 IRM change, taxpayers who have not engaged in flagrant conduct to evade tax, and therefore would have been shielded from levies

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1 Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) 5.11.6.3(5), Funds in Pension or Retirement Plans (Mar. 14, 2024), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-011-006](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-011-006). The IRS will also consider collection alternatives and whether the taxpayer relies on funds in the retirement account (or will in the near future) for necessary living expenses. IRM 5.11.6.3(3), (4), and (7), Funds in Pension or Retirement Plans (Mar. 14, 2024), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-011-006](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-011-006).

2 IRM 5.11.6.3(6), Funds in Pension or Retirement Plans (Mar. 14, 2024), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-011-006](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-011-006).

3 IRM 5.11.6.3(3), Funds in Pension or Retirement Plans (Mar. 14, 2024), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-011-006](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-011-006). The IRS will still take the other steps and verify the taxpayer received collection due process rights.

on their retirement accounts in the past, may agree to voluntary levies, perhaps out of fear or anxiety, and consequently find themselves in economic hardship during retirement.

It is important to note that taxpayers generally may not rely on IRM violations as a basis for challenging IRS actions in court, and the IRS may modify or rescind IRM provisions at any time without congressional or public input.

Because retirement accounts are critical to retirees' financial well-being, we recommend that Congress codify levy protections, rather than leaving their scope to the IRS's discretion. Under IRC § 6334, the IRS is prohibited from levying on certain sources of payment, such as unemployment and child support. These exceptions reflect policy determinations. For example, Congress has determined the IRS should not levy on child support payments because doing so would likely harm children. To better protect retirement savings, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommends Congress add retirement savings to the list of exempt property, absent flagrant conduct, and define the term "flagrant conduct" in the statute.<sup>4</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend IRC § 6334(a) to include qualified retirement savings as a category of property exempt from levy unless it is determined that the taxpayer has engaged in flagrant conduct and the levy would not create an economic hardship.<sup>5</sup>
- Amend IRC § 6334 to define "flagrant conduct" as an action intended to evade or defeat any tax imposed by Title 26 or the collection or payment of any such tax.<sup>6</sup>

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4 We recognize that adopting these recommendations would impact taxpayers who might want to dip into their retirement savings to pay their tax debts and request a levy to avoid the ten percent tax that applies to early distributions from retirement accounts. On balance, however, we believe the greater protections afforded to retirement savings by our recommendations outweigh this impact.

5 In rare cases, a taxpayer with vast retirement savings may be delinquent in paying his or her tax debts without having engaged in flagrant conduct. To avoid providing an unlimited exemption from levy in these cases, Congress could make the levy exemption subject to a cap, such as \$1 million in qualified retirement savings, and index it for inflation to maintain its value in future years.

6 For legislative language generally consistent with these recommendations, see, e.g., John Lewis Taxpayer Protection Act, H.R. 3738, 117th Cong. § 203 (2021); and Taxpayer Protection Act, H.R. 2171, 115th Cong. § 203 (2017).

**Legislative Recommendation #25****Provide Taxpayer Protections Before the IRS Recommends the Filing of a Lien Foreclosure Suit on a Principal Residence****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* One of the most severe and potentially devastating actions the IRS can take to collect a tax debt is to seize and sell a taxpayer's home. The IRS can do this in one of two ways – administratively (seizure and sale) or judicially (lien foreclosure). The law provides significant and meaningful taxpayer protections before an administrative seizure and sale may take place. However, far fewer procedural safeguards exist for taxpayers in judicial lien foreclosure suits.
- *Solution:* Provide taxpayers and their families who are subject to judicial lien foreclosure suits the same protections as taxpayers who are subject to administrative seizure and sale of their principal residence.

**PRESENT LAW**

Selling a taxpayer's principal residence to satisfy a tax liability is one of the most intrusive collection remedies the IRS can impose against a taxpayer. The IRS has two different procedures to collect delinquent taxes from a taxpayer's principal residence: (1) an administrative seizure and sale; or (2) a lien foreclosure suit. The two cannot be used concurrently. The IRS generally uses the administrative seizure and sale procedures unless there are "questions concerning title to the particular property or priorities of liens that create an unfavorable or impossible market for administrative sale" or "it may be difficult to obtain the property or to preserve its value, and the aid of the court is necessary."<sup>1</sup> In these situations, the IRS uses the lien foreclosure procedure to enhance its ability to sell the property and obtain a higher sale price.

**Administrative Seizure**

IRC § 6334(a)(13) provides that a taxpayer's principal residence is generally exempt from levy, except as provided in subsection (e). IRC § 6334(e)(1)(A) provides that a principal residence shall not be exempt from levy if a U.S. district court judge or magistrate "approves (in writing) the levy of such residence." An administrative seizure is generally subject to significant taxpayer protections. The government must show that "the taxpayer's other assets subject to collection are insufficient to pay the amount due,"<sup>2</sup> and that "no reasonable alternative for collection of a taxpayer's debt exists."<sup>3</sup> In addition, if the property is owned by the taxpayer but is used as the principal residence of the taxpayer's spouse, former spouse, or minor child, the IRS is required to send a letter addressed to or on behalf of each such person providing notice of the commencement of the proceeding. If "it is unclear who is living in the principal residence property and/or what such person's relationship is to the taxpayer," the IRS must address the letter to "Occupant."<sup>4</sup> Additionally, IRC § 6343(a) requires the IRS to release a levy under certain circumstances, including where it determines that the levy "is creating an economic hardship due to the financial condition of the taxpayer."<sup>5</sup>

1 Chief Counsel Directives Manual 34.6.2.2(1), Judicial Enforcement of the Tax Lien (Aug. 8, 2023), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part34/irm\\_34-006-002](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part34/irm_34-006-002); see also Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) 5.17.4.8.2.1, Administrative Collection Devices Are Not Feasible or Adequate (Mar. 25, 2022), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-017-004](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-017-004).

2 IRC § 6334(e).

3 Treas. Reg. § 301.6334-1(d)(1). This requirement in the regulations is consistent with the legislative history of IRC § 6334(e), which states that a principal residence "should only be seized to satisfy tax liability as a last resort." S. Rep. No. 105-174, at 86-87 (1998).

4 Treas. Reg. § 301.6334-1(d)(3).

5 IRC § 6343(a)(1)(D).

## Lien Foreclosure Suit

IRC § 7403 authorizes the Department of Justice (DOJ) to file a civil action against a taxpayer in a U.S. district court to enforce a tax lien and foreclose on a taxpayer's property. There is no exclusion for property consisting of a taxpayer's principal residence. As compared with administrative seizures, statutory taxpayer protections are considerably more limited in lien foreclosure suits. For example, the Supreme Court has held: "We can think of virtually no circumstances ... in which it would be permissible to refuse to authorize a sale simply to protect the interests of the delinquent taxpayer himself or herself."<sup>6</sup> A court has some discretion to refuse to authorize a sale that would impact a spouse, children, or other third parties, but even in that circumstance, the discretion is limited.<sup>7</sup> Further, there is no requirement the IRS establish that "no reasonable alternative for collection of a taxpayer's debt exists" or that the IRS notify the taxpayer's spouse, former spouse, or family unless they have an ownership interest in the property to be foreclosed.<sup>8</sup>

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

IRC § 6334(e), requiring judicial approval of the administrative sale of principal residences, was enacted as part of the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998. The Senate Finance Committee report stated that the "seizure of the taxpayer's principal residence is particularly disruptive to the taxpayer as well as the taxpayer's family," and a principal residence therefore "should only be seized to satisfy tax liability as a last resort."<sup>9</sup>

This code section provided protections to taxpayers subject to administrative seizures of principal residences but offered no such protections to taxpayers subject to judicial foreclosures of principal residences. While the IRS may prefer one procedure over the other depending on the circumstances, from a taxpayer's standpoint there is no meaningful difference between these two actions. A lien foreclosure has the same devastating impact as an administrative seizure. The result is that the taxpayer's principal residence is sold, and the proceeds are applied to his or her tax liability. Both groups of taxpayers deserve the same protections, as do their families.

At the recommendation of the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate, the IRS has written procedures into its Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) that provide additional taxpayer protections before a case may be referred to DOJ for the filing of a lien foreclosure suit.<sup>10</sup> The IRM prescribes certain initial steps the IRS must take, such as attempting to identify the occupants of a residence and advising the taxpayer about TAS assistance options. It also sets forth an internal approval process prior to referring a lien enforcement case to DOJ. However, the IRM is simply a set of instructions to IRS staff. Taxpayers generally may not rely on IRM violations as a basis for challenging IRS actions in court, and the IRS may modify or rescind IRM provisions at any time.

Because of the devastating impact the seizure of a taxpayer's principal residence may have on the taxpayer and his or her family, the National Taxpayer Advocate believes taxpayer protections from lien foreclosure suits should be codified and not left for the IRS to determine through IRM procedures.

<sup>6</sup> *United States v. Rodgers*, 461 U.S. 677, 709 (1983).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 680, 709-710.

<sup>8</sup> In *United States v. Maris*, 109 A.F.T.R.2d 2012-775 (D. Nev. 2012), the court held that the United States was required to establish that no reasonable alternative existed for collection of the taxpayer's debt before foreclosing tax liens on a principal residence. See also *United States v. Maris*, 111 A.F.T.R.2d 2013-2475 (D. Nev. 2013). However, other courts have held that the requirements for administrative seizure and sale of a principal residence are not applicable to lien foreclosure under IRC § 7403. See, e.g., *United States v. Martynuk*, 115 A.F.T.R.2d 2015-613 (S.D.N.Y. 2015) (declining to follow *Maris*) and the cases cited therein.

<sup>9</sup> S. REP. NO. 105-174, at 86-87 (1998).

<sup>10</sup> See IRM 5.17.4.8.2.5, Lien Foreclosure on a Principal Residence (Sept. 8, 2023), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-017-004](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-017-004); IRM 5.17.12.20.2.2.4, Additional Items for Lien Foreclosure of Taxpayer's Principal Residence (Nov. 9, 2023), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-017-012](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-017-012); IRM 25.3.2.4.5.2(3), Actions Involving the Principal Residence of the Taxpayer (Nov. 9, 2023), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part25/irm\\_25-003-002r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part25/irm_25-003-002r).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend IRC § 7403 to codify current IRM administrative protections, including that an IRS employee must receive executive-level written approval to proceed with a lien foreclosure suit referral.
- Amend IRC § 7403 to preclude the IRS from requesting that DOJ file a civil action in a U.S. district court seeking to enforce a tax lien and foreclose on a taxpayer's principal residence, except where the IRS has determined that:
  - (1) The taxpayer's other property or rights to property, if sold, would be insufficient to pay the amount due, including the expenses of the proceedings, and no reasonable alternative exists for collection of the taxpayer's debt;
  - (2) The foreclosure and sale of the residence would not create an economic hardship due to the financial condition of the taxpayer; and
  - (3) If the property to be levied is owned by the taxpayer but is used as the principal residence of the taxpayer's spouse, former spouse, or minor child, the IRS has sent a notice addressed in the name of the taxpayer's spouse or ex-spouse, individually or on behalf of any minor children.<sup>11</sup>

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11 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act of 2023, H.R. 2681 and S. 1177, 118th Cong. § 11 (2023); Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act of 2015, H.R. 1828 and S. 949, 114th Cong. § 16 (2015); and Eliminating Improper and Abusive IRS Audits Act of 2014, S. 2215, 113th Cong. § 8 (2014).

**Legislative Recommendation #26****Provide Collection Due Process Rights to Third Parties Holding Legal Title to Property Subject to IRS Collection Actions****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* When the IRS takes collection actions against a taxpayer, the taxpayer is entitled to a Collection Due Process (CDP) hearing at which they may raise defenses, challenge the appropriateness of the collection action, and propose collection alternatives. In some cases, the IRS takes collection actions against property held by third parties, but these third parties are not entitled to a CDP hearing. Therefore, they have fewer procedural protections than the taxpayer who actually owes the tax.
- *Solution:* Clarify that affected third parties who hold legal title to property subject to IRS collection actions are entitled to CDP protections to the same extent as the taxpayer who owes the tax.

**PRESENT LAW**

When a taxpayer does not pay their federal tax due upon notice and demand, a tax lien for the unpaid amount automatically arises under IRC § 6321. The IRS may file a Notice of Federal Tax Lien (NFTL) against and levy upon (seize) all property or rights to property of “any person liable to pay any tax” who neglects or refuses to pay,<sup>1</sup> including property owned by certain third-party individuals or entities. These third parties include nominees, alter egos, and persons to whom lien-encumbered property is transferred (collectively, “affected third parties”).

The tax code also provides certain CDP rights to a taxpayer when the IRS takes collection action. IRC § 6320(a) requires the IRS to give taxpayers notice and an opportunity for a hearing after it files an NFTL. IRC § 6330(a) generally requires the IRS to give taxpayers notice and an opportunity for a hearing before it issues a levy. The IRS must provide these CDP rights to “the person described in section 6321” after filing an NFTL and to “any person with respect to any unpaid tax” before levying against property.<sup>2</sup> When the IRS takes collection actions against affected third parties, however, it does not provide CDP rights, even though it seeks to collect from their property and has thus determined they are liable with respect to the unpaid tax to the extent of such property.<sup>3</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Congress created CDP notice and hearing procedures to give taxpayers the right to a meaningful hearing before the IRS levies their property or immediately after the IRS files an NFTL against their property. During a CDP hearing with the IRS Independent Office of Appeals (Appeals), a taxpayer has the opportunity to raise defenses, challenge the appropriateness of collection actions, and propose collection alternatives.<sup>4</sup> If the parties

<sup>1</sup> See IRC §§ 6321, 6323(f), 6331(a).

<sup>2</sup> IRC §§ 6320(a)(1), 6330(a)(1). IRC § 6321 also refers to “any person liable to pay any tax.”

<sup>3</sup> A CDP lien notice will only be given to the person described in IRC § 6321 who is named on the NFTL. Treas. Reg. § 301.6320-1(a)(2), Q&A-A1. A CDP levy notice will only be given to the person described in IRC § 6331(a). Treas. Reg. § 301.6330-1(a)(3), Q&A-A1.

<sup>4</sup> IRC §§ 6320(c), 6330(c)(2).

cannot resolve the issues, Appeals issues a notice of determination that allows the taxpayer to seek judicial review in the U.S. Tax Court.<sup>5</sup>

In some affected third-party circumstances, the IRS seeks to collect from specific property (*e.g.*, property that has been transferred to a third party subject to a tax lien). In other cases, the IRS seeks to collect from all of the affected third party's property (*e.g.*, an alter ego).<sup>6</sup> In both situations, the IRS may file NFTLs that identify the affected third party and levy upon property that, under state law, belongs to the affected third party. The Treasury regulations interpret the term "person" as including only the taxpayer (*i.e.*, the person upon whom the tax was imposed and who refused or neglected to pay following notice and demand) for purposes of CDP eligibility,<sup>7</sup> and the U.S. Tax Court has upheld Treasury's interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the IRS does not afford affected third parties CDP rights when the IRS takes collection actions against the property.<sup>9</sup>

The collection remedies for affected third parties are unduly burdensome and inefficient and lack adequate procedural safeguards. A third party may seek administrative review of a nominee/alter ego lien or levy determination by requesting a Collection Appeals Program (CAP) hearing through Appeals.<sup>10</sup> However, since Appeals' goal is to decide CAP cases within five days,<sup>11</sup> a CAP hearing only provides a summary review. While quick resolution is a laudable goal, an affected third party utilizing a CAP appeal may not receive a thorough review. Further, CAP decisions are final and not subject to judicial review.<sup>12</sup> The only judicial remedies require the affected third party to file suit in a U.S. district court,<sup>13</sup> which is difficult to navigate without legal representation and can be costly for all parties. Affected third parties who cannot afford the significant expense and burden of litigation may never be able to challenge an inappropriate or unlawful collection action.

In fiscal year (FY) 2024, the IRS issued 192,523 CDP notices to taxpayers; 10,829 taxpayers requested CDP hearings; and 1,116 taxpayers filed CDP petitions in the U.S. Tax Court.<sup>14</sup> By comparison, the IRS only filed 1,200 nominee and alter ego NFTLs during FY 2024.<sup>15</sup> Thus, expressly providing CDP rights to affected third parties would not impose an undue administrative burden on the IRS and would reduce litigation costs for both the government and the affected third parties.

For these reasons, the National Taxpayer Advocate believes it is incongruous and inequitable for taxpayers who originally were responsible for tax debts to receive the full protection of IRC §§ 6320 and 6330, while affected third parties holding legal title to property subject to IRS collection actions do not receive these same due process protections.

5 IRC §§ 6320(c), 6330(d)(1).

6 See *Oxford Capital Corp. v. United States*, 211 F.3d 280, 284 (5th Cir. 2000); Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) 5.17.2.5.7(2), Property Held by Third Parties (Jan. 8, 2016), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-017-002](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-017-002).

7 Treas. Reg. § 301.6320-1(a)(2), Q&A-A1; Treas. Reg. § 301.6330-1(a)(3), Q&A-A1.

8 See *Greenoak Holdings Ltd. v. Comm'r*, 143 T.C. 170 (2014).

9 See *Greenoak Holdings Ltd. v. Comm'r*, 143 T.C. 170 (2014); Treas. Reg. §§ 301.6320-1(a)(2), Q&A-A7, 301.6330-1(a)(3), Q&A-A2, 301.6320-1(b)(2), Q&A-B5, and 301.6330-1(b)(2), Q&A-B5.

10 Treas. Reg. §§ 301.6320-1(b)(2), Q&A-B5, 301.6330-1(b)(2), Q&A-B5.

11 IRM 8.24.1.3.8, Case Procedures under CAP (Aug. 20, 2024), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part8/irm\\_08-024-001](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part8/irm_08-024-001).

12 *Hughes v. Comm'r*, T.C. Memo. 2012-42; IRM 8.24.1.2, Distinctions Between CAP and Collection Due Process (CDP) Hearings (Sept. 28, 2021), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part8/irm\\_08-024-001](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part8/irm_08-024-001).

13 For example, if the IRS has filed an NFTL, the third party who holds the title is left with the option to bring an action to quiet title under 28 U.S.C. § 2410 in a U.S. district court. To contest a nominee, alter ego, or transferee levy, the affected third party must file a wrongful levy action under IRC § 7426 in a U.S. district court.

14 Of the total hearing requests, 6,170 involved individuals and 4,659 involved business taxpayers. IRS Compliance Data Warehouse (CDW), Individual Master File (FY 2024) (through Sept. 26, 2024); IRS CDW, Business Master File (FY 2024) (through Sept. 26, 2024). This data includes FY 2024 CDP notices mailed and CDP hearings requested as indicated on the taxpayers' accounts by September 26, 2024. Actual numbers may be higher because some may not have been posted to taxpayer accounts until FY 2025. The total number of CDP petitions filed in the Tax Court was compiled by the IRS Office of Chief Counsel. IRS, Counsel Automated Tracking System, Subtype DU. This data does not include cases on appeal.

15 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 21, 2024).

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC §§ 6320 and 6330 to extend CDP rights to affected third parties who hold legal title to property subject to IRS collection actions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For more detail, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2012 Annual Report to Congress 544 (Legislative Recommendation: *Amend IRC §§ 6320 and 6330 to Provide Collection Due Process Rights to Third Parties (Known as Nominees, Alter Egos, and Transferees) Holding Legal Title to Property Subject to IRS Collection Actions*), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Legislative-Recommendations-The-IRS-Should-Provide-Collection-Due-Process-Rights-to-Third-Parties-Holding-Property.pdf>.

**Legislative Recommendation #27****Extend the Time Limit for Taxpayers to Sue for Damages for Improper Collection Actions****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Both taxpayers and the government benefit when the IRS has an opportunity to consider a taxpayer's claim to recover damages for improper collection actions before the taxpayer files suit in court, but current filing deadlines in some cases require taxpayers to file suit in court before the IRS has a chance to consider their claims.
- *Solution:* Give taxpayers more time to file suit in court if they have filed a timely administrative claim with the IRS.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7433(a) authorizes taxpayers harmed by improper collection actions to sue the United States for damages if an IRS employee has recklessly or intentionally, or by reason of negligence, disregarded any provision of the tax code or any regulation relating to the collection of federal tax. Under IRC § 7433(d)(3) and Treas. Reg. § 301.7433-1(g)(2), the suit must be brought in a U.S. district court within two years from the date on which the taxpayer had a reasonable opportunity to discover all essential elements of a possible cause of action.

Before a taxpayer may sue the United States, IRC § 7433(d)(1) requires the taxpayer to file an administrative claim with the IRS. Treas. Reg. § 301.7433-1(d) provides that a taxpayer generally may not file suit in court until the earlier of (i) the date six months after filing an administrative claim or (ii) the date on which the IRS renders a decision on the claim. However, if the claim is filed within the last six months of the two-year period for filing suit, the taxpayer may file suit in court at any time before expiration of the two-year period.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

IRC § 7433(d)(1) reflects a policy decision that it is generally in the best interests of both the taxpayer and the government to allow the IRS to consider and render a decision on a taxpayer's claim before a case is brought to court. If a case is resolved at the administrative level, both parties are spared the time and expense of litigation. Treas. Reg. § 301.7433-1(d) reflects a complementary policy decision that if the IRS does not render a decision on an administrative claim within six months, taxpayers should be able to bring their cases to court without having to wait indefinitely for an IRS decision.

The existing rules, however, do not always achieve the goal of allowing the IRS to consider and render a decision before a taxpayer files suit. For example, while a claim is pending at the administrative level, the two-year period for filing suit in a U.S. district court continues to run. If a taxpayer files an administrative claim during the final six months of the two-year period, the taxpayer may be forced to file suit in a U.S. district court before the IRS has an opportunity to render a decision on the administrative claim (or else will forfeit the right to do so).

To give the IRS an opportunity to render an administrative decision while preserving the taxpayer's right to challenge an adverse decision in court, the two-year period that commences when the right of action accrues should be tied to the deadline for filing an administrative claim (rather than the deadline for filing suit).

Specifically, if the IRS renders an adverse or partially adverse decision on a timely filed administrative claim, the taxpayer should be allowed to file suit within two years from the date of the IRS's decision (*i.e.*, similar to the time allowed for filing suit after a refund claim is denied).

At the same time, to ensure taxpayers do not have to wait indefinitely for an IRS decision, a taxpayer should be permitted to file suit in a U.S. district court if a timely filed administrative claim goes unanswered for six months. These rules would ensure the IRS has a full six-month period to consider and render a decision on a taxpayer's damages claim based on an alleged improper collection action while preserving the taxpayer's right to file suit if the IRS does not render a timely decision.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend IRC § 7433(d)(1) to provide that before a taxpayer may file a civil action, the taxpayer must first file an administrative claim with the IRS within two years from the date a right of action accrues.
- Amend IRC § 7433(d)(3) to allow taxpayers to file a civil action in a U.S. district court (i) no earlier than six months from the date on which the administrative claim was filed and (ii) no later than the earlier of two years from the date on which the IRS sends its decision on the administrative claim to the taxpayer by certified or registered mail or, if the IRS does not render a decision, five years from the date the right of action accrued to file the administrative claim with the IRS.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Taxpayer Bill of Rights Enhancement Act of 2017, S. 1793, 115th Cong. § 201(c) (2017); and Taxpayer Bill of Rights Enhancement Act of 2015, S. 1578, 114th Cong. § 301(c) (2015). Other bills have proposed simply lengthening the period to bring an action under IRC § 7433(d)(3) from two years to five years. See, e.g., Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act of 2023, S. 1177 and H.R. 2681, 118th Cong. § 3(b) (2023); and Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act of 2022, S. 1656 and H.R. 7033, 117th Cong. § 3(b) (2022).

**Legislative Recommendation #28****Revise the Private Debt Collection Rules to More Accurately Identify and Protect Taxpayers With Incomes Below 200 Percent of the Federal Poverty Level****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The tax code prohibits the IRS from utilizing private companies to collect the tax debt of any taxpayer with adjusted gross income (AGI) of 200 percent or less of the Federal Poverty Level. The IRS currently determines AGI by relying exclusively on a taxpayer's last-filed tax return, going back up to ten years. However, collectability determinations are normally made on the basis of the taxpayer's current financial condition, and a tax return filed ten years ago is not a reliable measure of a taxpayer's current financial condition.
- *Solution:* Direct the IRS to determine a taxpayer's AGI based on third-party information reporting documents (*e.g.*, Forms W-2 and 1099) if no return has been filed in the last two years.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6306 directs the Secretary to enter into qualified tax collection contracts with private collection agencies (PCAs) to collect certain "inactive tax receivables."<sup>1</sup> Subsection (d) of IRC § 6306 lists categories of collection cases that are not eligible for assignment to PCAs.

The Taxpayer First Act (TFA) added the following category to the list:<sup>2</sup>

[A] taxpayer who is an individual with adjusted gross income, as determined for the most recent taxable year for which such information is available, which does not exceed 200 percent of the applicable poverty level (as determined by the Secretary).

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

The IRS has implemented the exclusion for taxpayers with AGIs that do not exceed 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level in a manner that fails to identify those taxpayers accurately. It has chosen to rely exclusively on a filed tax return, even if the taxpayer has not filed a recent return. Rather than using alternative means to determine the taxpayer's current AGI (*e.g.*, third-party information reporting documents like Forms W-2 and 1099), the IRS reaches back up to *ten years* to locate a return to determine AGI.

This approach produces anomalous results. A taxpayer who could afford to pay tax ten years ago may not be able to do so today – and these are the cases Congress intended to exclude from assignment to PCAs. Conversely, a taxpayer who could not afford to pay tax ten years ago might have earned additional income or acquired additional assets and might now be able to make payments.

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<sup>1</sup> IRC § 6306(a), (c).

<sup>2</sup> TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1205, 133 Stat. 981, 989 (2019) (adding IRC § 6306(d)(3)(F)).

*Example:* A taxpayer last filed a tax return in 2015 when he earned \$60,000. In 2016, he retired due to age or disability. He did not pay his tax liability and still has a balance due. Since 2015, his income has consisted solely of Social Security benefits, and he has not had a filing obligation. Under its current approach, the IRS will look at the taxpayer's 2015 tax return, determine the taxpayer's income is above 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, and assign his case to a PCA. Yet this is a case the TFA sought to exclude from PCA assignment.

By contrast, if the same taxpayer earned only \$30,000 in 2015, and third-party information reports show he earned \$100,000 in 2024, the case might not be assigned to a PCA under the IRS's approach, even though the taxpayer can make payments currently.

To ensure that collectability determinations are made based on current data, the National Taxpayer Advocate has recommended that the IRS utilize information on a tax return if one has been filed in the last two years and, if not, that the IRS compute AGI from the information reporting documents the IRS receives.<sup>3</sup>

If the IRS relies on information reporting documents, it will have to use gross income rather than AGI because it may not know which adjustments the taxpayer is qualified to claim, if any. In some cases, that may have the effect of overestimating a taxpayer's AGI and therefore assigning some cases to PCAs that should have been excluded. Even so, we believe that basing collectability determinations on recent information will be far more accurate than reaching back for information up to ten years old.<sup>4</sup>

The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) reached a similar conclusion and has similarly recommended that the IRS consider using "both last return filed information and third-party income information in its methodology to exclude low-income taxpayers from PCA inventory."<sup>5</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6306(d)(3)(F) to direct the IRS to determine an individual's AGI "for the most recent taxable year for which such information is available" by reference to the individual's most recently filed tax return if one has been filed in the preceding two years or, if not, by reference to information reporting documents described in part III of subchapter A of chapter 61 of the IRC.

3 No method will perfectly identify taxpayers with current AGIs below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. If the IRS uses third-party information reporting documents to make collectability determinations, it will not take into account income not reported on those documents, such as self-employment income. But that is likely to be true even when the IRS relies on filed tax returns, as tax gap studies show most income not reported to the IRS on third-party documents is not reported on tax returns either. See IRS Pub. 1415, Federal Tax Compliance Research: Tax Gap Estimates for Tax Years 2014-2016, at 20 (Oct. 2022), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1415.pdf>.

4 A data run the IRS performed to compare the method the IRS is using with the method TAS has proposed found it would exclude roughly the same number of taxpayers. Cases assigned to PCAs as of September 12, 2019, were matched to the Individual Returns Transaction File to determine the last individual income tax return filed and to the Information Returns Master File to determine current income reported by third-party payors. For the reasons described above, we believe the TAS approach would do a better job of identifying the taxpayers whom Congress intended to exclude.

5 TIGTA, Ref. No. 2021-30-010, *Fiscal Year 2021 Biannual Independent Assessment of Private Collection Agency Performance* 20 (2020), <https://www.tigta.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2022-02/202130010fr.pdf>.

## REFORM PENALTY AND INTEREST PROVISIONS

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### Legislative Recommendation #29

## Convert the Estimated Tax Penalty Into an Interest Provision to Properly Reflect Its Substance

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* If a self-employed individual fails to pay sufficient estimated tax during the year, the IRS will impose an addition to tax that is calculated as an interest charge but classified as a penalty. The term “penalty” implies that the taxpayer has engaged in improper conduct, yet small business taxpayers often experience significant fluctuations in their incomes and expenses from year to year that make it difficult for them to accurately estimate their tax liabilities.
- *Solution:* Reclassify the addition to tax for underpaying estimated tax from a penalty to an interest charge.

### PRESENT LAW

Through the combination of wage withholding and estimated tax payments, the tax code aims to ensure that federal income and payroll taxes are paid ratably throughout the year. IRC § 3402 generally requires employers to withhold tax on wages paid to employees. For many employees, wage withholding covers their tax liabilities in full. But taxpayers who are self-employed or who have investment income typically are not subject to withholding on this non-wage income and instead must make estimated tax payments.

IRC § 6654 generally requires individual taxpayers to pay at least the lesser of (i) 90 percent of the tax shown on a tax return for the current tax year or (ii) 100 percent of the tax shown on a tax return for the preceding tax year (reduced by the amount of wage withholding) in four installment payments due on April 15, June 15, September 15, and January 15 of the following tax year.<sup>1</sup> IRC § 6655 generally requires corporate taxpayers to pay at least 100 percent of the tax shown on a tax return for the current tax year or, in some cases, 100 percent of the tax shown on a tax return for the preceding tax year in four installment payments due on April 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15.

IRC §§ 6654(a) and 6655(a) provide that a taxpayer who fails to pay sufficient estimated tax will be liable for a penalty that is computed by applying (i) the underpayment rate established under IRC § 6621(ii) to the amount of the underpayment (iii) for the period of the underpayment. IRC § 6621 is an interest provision. Therefore, the additional amount a taxpayer owes for failing to pay sufficient estimated tax is calculated as an interest charge, even though it is classified as a penalty.

Unlike the failure-to-file and failure-to-pay penalties described in IRC § 6651(a)(1) and (2) and the accuracy-related penalty described in IRC § 6662, the penalty for failure to pay estimated tax generally is not subject to a “reasonable cause” exception. IRC § 6654(e)(3) allows the IRS to waive the estimated tax penalty for

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<sup>1</sup> If the adjusted gross income of a taxpayer for the preceding tax year exceeds \$150,000, “110 percent” is substituted for “100 percent” in applying clause (ii). IRC § 6654(d)(1)(C).

individual taxpayers only in certain limited circumstances, including when the Secretary determines that imposing the penalty would be “against equity and good conscience” by reason of “casualty, disaster, or other unusual circumstances” or when a taxpayer retired after having attained the age of 62 or became disabled during the taxable year *and* the underpayment was due to reasonable cause.

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

For a variety of reasons, taxpayers often have difficulty estimating how much tax they will owe. Self-employed taxpayers or taxpayers who own small businesses may experience significant fluctuations in their income and expenses from year to year. Taxpayers with sizable investment incomes may also experience significant fluctuations. Substantial changes in tax laws, such as those that took effect in 2018, may affect tax liabilities in ways that taxpayers do not fully anticipate. As a result, millions of taxpayers do not satisfy the requirements of IRC § 6654 and are liable for penalties each year, even though many have reasonably attempted to comply. Corporate taxpayers face similar challenges.

The term “penalty” carries negative connotations, and the National Taxpayer Advocate believes it should be reserved for circumstances in which a taxpayer has failed to make reasonable efforts to comply with the law. Her position aligns with the assessment of the House Committee on Ways and Means when it wrote during a previous Congress: “Because the penalties for failure to pay estimated tax are calculated as interest charges, the Committee believes that conforming their title to the substance of the provision will improve taxpayers’ perceptions of the fairness of the estimated tax payment system.”<sup>2</sup> TAS has conducted research studies that have found “tax morale” has an impact on tax compliance.<sup>3</sup> Conforming the estimated tax penalty’s title to reflect its true substance as an interest provision should improve fairness and encourage voluntary compliance.<sup>4</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reclassify the penalty for failure to pay sufficient estimated tax as an interest charge – which is the basis for the calculation of the addition to tax. Toward that end, relocate IRC §§ 6654 and 6655 from chapter 68 to chapter 67 and make conforming modifications to the headings and text.<sup>5</sup>
- If the failure to pay sufficient estimated tax continues to be treated as a penalty, consider expanding the reasonable cause exception in IRC § 6654(e)(3)(B) to apply to all individual taxpayers.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> H.R. REP. NO. 108-61, at 23-24 (2003).

<sup>3</sup> See National Taxpayer Advocate 2013 Annual Report to Congress vol. 2, at 1 (Research Study: *Do Accuracy-Related Penalties Improve Future Reporting Compliance by Schedule C Filers?*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2013-ARC\\_VOL-2-1.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2013-ARC_VOL-2-1.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Interest provisions do not normally include waiver exceptions based on equitable considerations. See Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) 20.2.1.1.2(3), Authority (Jan. 25, 2021), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part20/irm\\_20-002-001r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part20/irm_20-002-001r). Nonetheless, Congress may consider preserving the limited waiver exception for the individual estimated tax penalty, which allows the IRS to waive the charge when it would violate equity and good conscience to impose it. IRC § 6654(e)(3)(A).

<sup>5</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Taxpayer Protection and IRS Accountability Act, H.R. 1528, 108th Cong. § 101 (2003).

<sup>6</sup> Expanding the reasonable cause exception in IRC § 6654(e)(3)(B) to all individual taxpayers, not just newly retired or disabled individuals, would allow the IRS to base relief on what is reasonable, rather than the more difficult standard of “against equity and good conscience.” See IRM 20.1.3.3.2.1.2, Waiver Criteria Under IRC 6654(e)(3)(A) (July 23, 2020), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part20/irm\\_20-001-003r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part20/irm_20-001-003r) (explaining that the “against equity and good conscience” standard is more limited than “reasonable cause”). For more details on a recommendation to expand the reasonable cause exception to all individual taxpayers who may be subject to the estimated tax payment regime for the first time, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2008 Annual Report to Congress vol. 2, at 34 (Research Study: *A Framework for Reforming the Penalty Regime*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/08\\_tas\\_arc\\_vol2.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/08_tas_arc_vol2.pdf).

**Legislative Recommendation #30****Apply a Single Interest Rate to Underpayments of Estimated Tax in the Periods Between Each Installment Due Date****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The due dates for estimated tax payments do not align with the dates on which the interest rate for estimated tax underpayments is adjusted. As a result, more than one interest rate may apply to an underpayment during the period between each estimated tax installment due date, causing unnecessary complexity and burden for taxpayers.
- *Solution:* Apply the same interest rate to underpayments of estimated tax for the entire period between each installment due date.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6654(c) provides that individual taxpayers who make estimated tax payments must submit those payments on or before April 15, June 15, September 15, and January 15 of the following taxable year.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, IRC § 6655(c) provides that corporations required to make installment payments must submit those payments on or before April 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15.<sup>2</sup> Failure to make required estimated tax payments results in a penalty that is determined by the underpayment rate, the amount of the underpayment, and the period of the underpayment.

Under IRC § 6621(a)(2), the underpayment rate is equal to the federal short-term interest rate, plus three percentage points. Under IRC § 6621(b)(1), the federal short-term interest rate is determined quarterly by the Secretary of the Treasury. If the Secretary determines a change in the federal short-term interest rate, the change is effective on January 1, April 1, July 1, or October 1.<sup>3</sup> For individual estimated tax underpayments, IRC § 6621(b)(2)(B) delays the timing of the April 1 rate change to April 15, partially aligning the timing of the interest rate changes with the requirements of IRC § 6654.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Under current law, more than one interest rate may apply to an underpayment in the period between each estimated tax installment due date. For example, if a taxpayer fails to make an estimated tax payment due June 15 and the Secretary determines a change in the federal short-term interest rate effective July 1, one interest rate would apply for the period from June 16 through June 30, and another rate would apply beginning July 1. A change in interest rate just 15 days after the estimated tax installment due date causes unnecessary complexity and burden for taxpayers. This complexity and burden would be reduced if the same interest rate applied to the entire period between required installments.

1 To make compliance easier, the National Taxpayer Advocate separately recommends that Congress set the estimated tax payment deadlines 15 days after the end of each calendar quarter (April 15, July 15, October 15, and January 15). See *Adjust Individual Estimated Tax Payment Deadlines to Occur Quarterly*, *supra*.

2 The dates referenced in the text apply to calendar-year taxpayers. Fiscal-year taxpayers will have estimated tax due dates in different months at similar intervals. Thus, they face the same problem as calendar-year taxpayers with interest rate adjustments that do not align with estimated tax installment due dates. See IRC §§ 6654(k), 6655(i).

3 IRC § 6621(b)(2)(A) (“[T]he Federal short-term rate determined under [§ 6621(b)(1)] for any month shall apply during the first calendar quarter beginning after such month.”).

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC §§ 6654 and 6655 to provide that the rate applied to an estimated tax underpayment shall be set as of the due date for each required estimated tax installment and shall be the underpayment rate established by IRC § 6621 for the calendar quarter of the due date of that required installment.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Taxpayer Bill of Rights Enhancement Act of 2017, S. 1793, 115th Cong. § 305 (2017). If this proposal is adopted, repeal of IRC § 6621(b)(2)(B) may be required. *See also* H.R. REP. NO. 108-61, at 25 (2003); Taxpayer Protection and IRS Accountability Act, H.R. 1528, 108th Cong. § 101 (2003).

## Legislative Recommendation #31

## Extend the Reasonable Cause Defense for the Failure-to-File Penalty to Taxpayers Who Rely on Return Preparers to E-File Their Returns

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* A taxpayer who fails to file a tax return by the deadline is subject to a late-filing penalty unless the taxpayer can demonstrate “reasonable cause” for the failure. In 1985, the Supreme Court held that reliance on a tax return preparer to file a return did not alone constitute reasonable cause for a late-filing penalty because the taxpayer had a responsibility to ensure the deadline was met. While that conclusion may be appropriate in the context of paper-filed returns where a taxpayer can mail the return themselves, it is not appropriate in the context of e-filed returns, where the preparer typically submits the return and the taxpayer cannot easily verify whether a return has been filed and accepted.
- *Solution:* Allow taxpayers who rely on tax return preparers to e-file their returns to receive reasonable cause relief from the failure-to-file penalty.

### PRESENT LAW

IRC § 6651(a)(1) imposes an addition to tax when a taxpayer fails to file a return by the due date unless the taxpayer can show the failure was due to reasonable cause and not due to willful neglect (the “failure-to-file penalty”).<sup>1</sup> Reasonable cause exists when a taxpayer has exercised ordinary business care and prudence but was unable to file the return within the prescribed time.<sup>2</sup>

In *United States v. Boyle*, the Supreme Court held that a taxpayer’s reliance on an agent to file a return did not constitute reasonable cause for late filing.<sup>3</sup> In *Boyle*, the tax return at issue was filed on paper. In 2023, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit held that the *Boyle* decision also applies to e-filed returns.<sup>4</sup> This was the first time a federal appeals court had decided the issue. Several U.S. district courts have similarly held that *Boyle* applies to e-filing.<sup>5</sup>

In the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998, Congress adopted a policy that “paperless filing should be the preferred method and most convenient means of filing Federal tax and information returns” and gave the Secretary broad authority to incentivize taxpayers to file returns electronically.<sup>6</sup> IRC § 6011(e)(3) authorizes the Secretary to require tax return preparers to file returns electronically unless they reasonably expect to file ten or fewer individual income tax returns during a calendar year. Treasury Regulation § 301.6011-7 implements this requirement.

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1 The penalty amount is five percent of the tax due for each month or partial month the return is late, up to a maximum of 25 percent. The penalty increases to 15 percent per month up to a maximum of 75 percent if the failure to file is fraudulent. IRC § 6651(f).

2 Treas. Reg. § 301.6651-1(c)(1). See also Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) 20.1.1.3.2, Reasonable Cause (Nov. 21, 2017), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part20/irm\\_20-001-001r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part20/irm_20-001-001r).

3 *Boyle*, 469 U.S. 241 (1985).

4 *Lee v. United States*, 84 F.4th 1271 (11th Cir. 2023).

5 See, e.g., *Haynes v. United States*, 119 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 2202 (W.D. Tex. 2017), *vacated and remanded*, 760 F. App’x 324 (5th Cir. 2019); *Intress v. United States*, 404 F. Supp. 3d 1174 (M.D. Tenn. 2019); *Oosterwijk v. United States*, 129 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 512 (D. Md. Jan. 27, 2022).

6 Pub. L. No. 105-206, § 2001, 112 Stat. 685, 723 (1998); IRC § 6011(f).

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

At the time *Boyle* was decided, all tax returns were filed on paper. Taxpayers generally could fulfill the basic responsibility of mailing returns to the IRS themselves, even when they engaged tax professionals to prepare them. In ruling that the taxpayer in *Boyle* was not entitled to reasonable cause abatement as a matter of law, the Supreme Court stated that “[i]t requires no special training or effort to ascertain a deadline and make sure that it is met.”<sup>7</sup>

In effect, the *Boyle* decision concluded that the duty to file a return is non-delegable. While that rule might make sense in a paper-filing context, it is not reasonable to apply it in the e-filing context. Today, most taxpayers effectively delegate the electronic filing of their returns to preparers or use software providers. Particularly when a taxpayer uses a preparer, the taxpayer is generally several steps removed from the filing process. When a preparer e-files a tax return, he or she must transmit it through an electronic return originator (typically, a software company) to the IRS. Thus, there are four parties sequentially involved in this chain: (i) the taxpayer; (ii) the preparer; (iii) the software company; and (iv) the IRS. If the IRS rejects an e-filed tax return, it generally sends a notification back through the software company to the preparer, but it will not notify the taxpayer directly.<sup>8</sup> In these circumstances, a taxpayer cannot easily ensure his or her return has been properly submitted by the preparer and accepted by the IRS. In addition, the IRS rejects e-filed returns before processing them for a variety of reasons, and unlike with paper filing, a return that is e-filed with the IRS but rejected before processing is not treated as timely filed.

While Treasury regulations generally require tax return preparers to e-file client returns, the regulations exempt preparers from the e-filing requirement if a taxpayer provides the preparer with “a hand-signed and dated statement” that says the taxpayer chooses to file a paper return.<sup>9</sup> Because taxpayers can mail paper returns themselves, this “opt-out” may reduce a taxpayer’s risk of incurring a failure-to-file penalty. In light of the congressional directive to incentivize e-filing, it makes little sense to increase the penalty risk for taxpayers who e-file.<sup>10</sup>

The Eleventh Circuit’s decision, *Lee v. United States*, highlights the unfairness of applying the *Boyle* rule in the context of e-filing. In many ways, the taxpayer in *Lee* was a model taxpayer. A surgeon with significant earnings, he hired a certified public accountant (CPA) to prepare and file his complicated returns for 2014–2016. During each of those years, he ensured the returns were timely prepared and verified, and he sent a signed Form 8879, *IRS e-file Signature Authorization*, to the CPA before the filing deadline. Additionally, he made significant overpayments of tax each year to avoid an underpayment penalty, choosing to apply the overpayments to the following year’s liability. However, his CPA never filed the returns, apparently because they were too complex for the filing software, and he did not tell the taxpayer. The CPA also did not provide the IRS with the taxpayer’s correct mailing address, so the taxpayer did not receive any notices. The taxpayer was completely unaware that his returns had not been filed until the IRS visited his office in 2018. Because the CPA had not filed the returns, the IRS did not apply the 2014 overpayment to subsequent years, leaving the taxpayer with tax liabilities for 2015 and 2016 and approximately \$70,000 in penalties.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Boyle*, 469 U.S. at 252.

<sup>8</sup> IRM 3.42.5.7.2(1), Form 1040 Online Filing (Nov. 22, 2023), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part3/irm\\_03-042-005r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part3/irm_03-042-005r).

<sup>9</sup> Treas. Reg. § 301.6011-7(a)(4)(ii).

<sup>10</sup> For context, over half of all individual income tax returns filed during 2024 were prepared by professionals and e-filed (more than 84 million returns). See IRS, 2024 Filing Season Statistics (week ending Oct. 18, 2024), <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/filing-season-statistics-for-week-ending-oct-18-2024>.

<sup>11</sup> The penalties were for failure to file a return under IRC § 6651(a)(1) and failure to pay tax under IRC § 6651(a)(2). The Eleventh Circuit noted that it and other courts have held that *Boyle* also applies to the failure-to-pay penalty. *Lee v. United States*, 84 F.4th 1271, 1275 (11th Cir. 2023).

After filing a refund claim with the IRS, which was denied, the taxpayer brought suit in U.S. district court, arguing there was reasonable cause for the failure to file due to his reliance on the CPA. The district court held that the *Boyle* rule applied to e-filed returns<sup>12</sup> and the Eleventh Circuit agreed. The taxpayer made several arguments as to why the penalties should be abated, including that once he had sent the Form 8879 to the CPA the burden was on the CPA to file the returns and the failure to do so was beyond the taxpayer's control. However, the Eleventh Circuit rejected the taxpayer's arguments, concluding there was no basis to treat e-filed returns differently from paper-filed returns under the Supreme Court's *Boyle* decision.

One judge wrote a concurring opinion “to highlight the risks facing taxpayers” due to *Boyle*'s application in the e-filing context, noting the fact that the taxpayer owed taxes and penalties to the IRS despite his otherwise prudent actions “is reflective of the current e-filing system and the precarious situation in which it places taxpayers who rely on” preparers.<sup>13</sup> The judge added: “[U]nder Boyle's bright line rule, it is not clear whether Lee would be excused from penalties *even if his accountant [had] affirmatively misrepresented to him that his returns were filed on time.*”<sup>14</sup>

Prior to the Eleventh Circuit's decision in *Lee*, several U.S. district courts had similarly held that *Boyle* applied in the e-filing context.<sup>15</sup> As in *Lee*, the facts of these cases illustrate the unfairness of *Boyle*'s application. In *Haynes v. United States*, a married couple employed a CPA to prepare and file their joint tax return.<sup>16</sup> The preparer timely e-filed the return, but the IRS did not accept it for processing because a taxpayer identification number was listed on the wrong line. The preparer did not receive a rejection notice from the IRS. The preparer notified the taxpayers that their return had been timely filed. Ten months later, the IRS notified the taxpayers that their return had not been received and asserted the failure-to-file penalty. The taxpayers requested penalty abatement for reasonable cause, asserting they had sought to file their return timely, their preparer had transmitted the return timely, and both the preparer and the taxpayers believed the return had been received. The taxpayers filed suit in district court, arguing that *Boyle* should not apply in the context of electronic filing because the complexities of e-filing vastly exceed the comparatively simple and verifiable task of mailing a return. The district court concluded that the holding in *Boyle* applies to e-filed returns to the same extent as paper-filed returns and ruled in the government's favor as a matter of law.<sup>17</sup>

The issue in these cases is not whether the failure-to-file penalty is applicable in the first instance. Based on the wording of the statute, there is no doubt the penalty is applicable if the return is filed late. Rather, the issue is whether taxpayers are entitled to request abatement of the penalty on reasonable cause grounds. Because the *Boyle* decision used relatively sweeping language, lower courts have seemingly felt bound to apply its holding in the context of e-filed returns, notwithstanding the significant differences between paper filing and electronic filing.

While the bright-line rule embodied in *Boyle* is convenient for the IRS to administer, the nearly automatic assessment of the failure-to-file penalty for e-filed returns deemed late (often where the return was submitted timely by the taxpayer or preparer but rejected by the IRS before processing) is grossly unfair and undermines

12 *Lee v. United States*, 129 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 667 (M.D. Fla. Feb. 8, 2022).

13 *Lee v. United States*, 84 F.4th 1271, 1281 (11th Cir. 2023) (Lagoa, J., concurring).

14 *Id.* at 1282 (emphasis added).

15 See, e.g., *Haynes v. United States*, 119 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 2202 (W.D. Tex. 2017), *vacated and remanded*, 760 F. App'x 324 (5th Cir. 2019); *Intress v. United States*, 404 F. Supp. 3d 1174 (M.D. Tenn. 2019); *Oosterwijk v. United States*, 129 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 512 (D. Md. Jan. 27, 2022).

16 119 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 2202 (W.D. Tex. 2017).

17 On appeal, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit vacated and remanded the district court's decision on different grounds and did not take a position on the *Boyle* issue. *Haynes v. United States*, 760 F. App'x 324 (5th Cir. 2019). See also Keith Fogg, *Reliance on Preparer Does Not Excuse Late E-Filing of Return*, PROCEDUREALLY TAXING (Sept. 4, 2019), <https://www.taxnotes.com/procedureally-taxing/reliance-preparer-does-not-excuse-late-e-filing-return/2019/09/04/7h5vr>.

the congressional policy that e-filing be encouraged. The American College of Tax Counsel shares this view and submitted a compelling *amicus curiae* brief in the appeal of the *Haynes* decision.<sup>18</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6651 to specify that reasonable cause relief may be available to taxpayers that use return preparers to submit their returns electronically and direct the Secretary to issue regulations specifying what constitutes ordinary business care and prudence for e-filed returns.

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18 See Brief of American College of Tax Counsel (Nov. 27, 2017), [https://www.actconline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ACTC\\_Amicus\\_Brief\\_Haynes.pdf](https://www.actconline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ACTC_Amicus_Brief_Haynes.pdf).

**Legislative Recommendation #32****Authorize a Penalty for Tax Return Preparers Who Engage in Fraud or Misconduct by Altering a Taxpayer's Tax Return****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* When a corrupt tax return preparer steals from a client or from the public fisc, the government's enforcement options are limited. The Department of Justice (DOJ) may bring criminal charges, but it lacks the resources to do so except in cases of widespread, high-dollar schemes. The alternative is civil penalties, but the law currently does not authorize meaningful civil penalties.
- *Solution:* Authorize the IRS to impose larger civil penalties in a wider range of cases.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6694(b) authorizes the IRS to impose a penalty when a tax return preparer has understated a taxpayer's liability on a return or claim for refund and the understatement is due to willful or reckless conduct.<sup>1</sup> IRC § 6695(f) imposes a \$500 penalty (adjusted for inflation) on a preparer who negotiates (*e.g.*, endorses) a taxpayer's refund check.<sup>2</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

TAS has handled hundreds of cases involving return preparer fraud or misconduct. In the most common scenario, a taxpayer visits a preparer to get a tax return prepared, the preparer completes the return while the taxpayer is present, and the preparer alters the return after the taxpayer leaves before submitting it to the IRS. In some cases, the items of income, deduction, and credit are accurate, but the preparer alters the direct deposit routing information so that the entire refund is directed to the preparer's account instead of the taxpayer's account. In other cases, the preparer increases the refund amount by altering items of income, deduction, or credit and then elects a split refund<sup>3</sup> so the taxpayer receives the refund amount he expects, and the additional amount goes to the preparer.

The DOJ may bring criminal charges against preparers who alter tax returns, but resource constraints generally preclude criminal charges except in cases of widespread schemes. In addition, the dollar amount of a refund obtained by a preparer in these cases often will determine whether DOJ pursues an erroneous refund suit under IRC § 7405, also due to resource constraints.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is important that the IRS have the authority to impose sizeable civil penalties against preparers who alter tax returns without the knowledge or consent of the taxpayers who hired them.

1 The amount of the penalty is per return or claim for refund, equal to the greater of \$5,000 or 75 percent of the income derived (or to be derived) by the tax return preparer with respect to the return or claim. IRC § 6694(b)(1)(A), (B).

2 The penalty is assessed on a per-check basis and adjusted annually for inflation, as provided by IRC § 6695(h).

3 Taxpayers can split their refunds among up to three accounts at a bank or other financial institution. See IRS, Form 8888, Allocation of Refund (Including Savings Bond Purchases) (Nov. 2022), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f8888.pdf>. The instructions to Form 8888 specifically advise taxpayers not to deposit their refunds into their tax return preparer's account.

4 See Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) 21.4.5.15(6), Collection Methods for Category D Erroneous Refunds (Oct. 1, 2007), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part21/irm\\_21-004-005r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part21/irm_21-004-005r) ("The erroneous refund suit is limited to amounts that exceed the litigating threshold established by the Department of Justice.").

Under current law, the IRS has very limited authority to impose civil penalties in instances of preparer fraud or misconduct. The IRC § 6694 penalty generally will not apply to either of the scenarios described above for the following reasons:

- When a preparer has altered only the direct deposit information on the return and has not changed the tax liability, there is no understatement of tax.
- When a preparer has altered items of income, deduction, or credit to increase a taxpayer's refund after the taxpayer has reviewed and approved the return for filing, the IRS Office of Chief Counsel has concluded that the resulting document is not a valid tax return.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, it is unclear whether the IRC § 6695(f) penalty applies. Treasury regulations have interpreted the IRC § 6695(f) penalty as applicable to a preparer who negotiates “a check (including an electronic version of a check).”<sup>6</sup> Although the IRS's internal procedures currently treat direct deposits as subject to the IRC § 6695(f) penalty, the tax code and regulations do not make clear whether a direct deposit is legally identical to an electronic version of a check.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, even if the penalty is applicable, the penalty amount for calendar year 2024 of \$635<sup>8</sup> is small in relation to the size of refunds that some preparers misappropriate and therefore is unlikely to serve as a deterrent.

The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends the IRS be given the authority to assess and collect civil penalties against tax return preparers who engage in fraud or misconduct by altering the return of a taxpayer for personal financial gain.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend IRC § 6694(b) so the penalty the IRS may assess against a tax return preparer for understating a taxpayer's liability is broadened beyond tax returns and claims for refund by adding the words “and other submissions purporting to be returns.”
- Amend IRC § 6695 to (i) explicitly cover a preparer who misappropriates a taxpayer's refund by changing the direct deposit information and (ii) increase the dollar amount of the penalty to deter preparers from engaging in this type of fraud or misconduct. To make the public fisc whole, the penalty should be equal to 100 percent of the amount a preparer has improperly converted to his own use by altering a taxpayer's return or direct deposit information.

5 IRS, Program Manager Technical Advice (PMTA) 2011-20, Tax Return Preparer's Alteration of a Return (June 27, 2011), [https://www.irs.gov/pub/irb/2011-20/pmta\\_2011-20.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/irb/2011-20/pmta_2011-20.pdf); PMTA 2011-13, Horse's Tax Service (May 12, 2003), [https://www.irs.gov/pub/irb/2011-13/pmta\\_2011-13.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/irb/2011-13/pmta_2011-13.pdf).

6 Treas. Reg. § 1.6695-1(f)(1).

7 See IRM 20.1.6.5.6, Negotiation of Check – IRC 6695(f) (Oct. 13, 2021), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part20/irm\\_20-001-006](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part20/irm_20-001-006).

8 Rev. Proc. 2023-34, 2023-48 I.R.B. 1296, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-irb/2023-48.pdf>.

**Legislative Recommendation #33****Clarify That Supervisory Approval Is Required Under IRC § 6751(b) Before Proposing Penalties****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* By law, some penalties require supervisory approval. However, due to an apparent drafting error, the statute leaves the timing of the required approval unclear. This ambiguity has generated conflicting decisions among the courts, creating confusion for taxpayers and the IRS alike and seemingly undermining the purpose of the supervisory approval requirement.
- *Solution:* Clarify that supervisory approval is required before a proposed penalty is communicated in written form to a taxpayer.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6751(b)(1) provides: “No penalty under this title shall be assessed unless the initial determination of such assessment is personally approved (in writing) by the immediate supervisor of the individual making such determination or such higher-level official as the Secretary may designate.”

IRC § 6751(b)(2) carves out two categories of exceptions from this supervisory approval requirement:

- The additions to tax for failure to file a tax return or pay the tax due (IRC § 6651), the additions to tax for failure to pay sufficient estimated tax (IRC §§ 6654 and 6655), and the penalty for the overstatement or disallowance of certain charitable contribution deductions (IRC § 6662(b)(9) and (10)), and
- Any other penalty that is “automatically calculated through electronic means.”<sup>1</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE<sup>2</sup>**

IRC § 6751(b) protects the taxpayer *right to a fair and just tax system*<sup>3</sup> by ensuring that penalties are only imposed in appropriate circumstances and are not used as a bargaining chip to encourage settlement.<sup>4</sup> However, the statutory phrase “initial determination of [an] assessment” is unclear. A “determination” is made based on the IRS’s investigation of the taxpayer’s liability and an application of the penalty statutes. An “assessment” is merely the entry of a decision on IRS records. Therefore, while a penalty can be determined and a penalty can be assessed, the IRS cannot “determine” an “assessment.”<sup>5</sup> Due to this apparent drafting error and consequent ambiguity in the statute, an increasing number of courts have had to grapple with

1 Generally, a penalty is considered automatically calculated through electronic means if the penalty is proposed by an IRS computer program without human involvement. See, e.g., *Walquist v. Comm’r*, 152 T.C. 61 (2019).

2 See also Erin M. Collins, Treasury FY 2025 Green Book Proposes to Abolish a Taxpayer Right by Essentially Eliminating Written Supervisory Approval for Penalties Enacted by Congress, NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE BLOG (May 2, 2024), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog/treasury-fy-2025-green-book-proposes-to-essentially-eliminate-written-supervisory-approval-for-penalties/2024/05>.

3 See Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TBOR), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/taxpayer-rights> (last visited Sept. 18, 2024). The rights contained in TBOR are also codified in IRC § 7803(a)(3).

4 See S. REP. NO. 105-174, at 65 (1998).

5 See *Chai v. Comm’r*, 851 F.3d 190, 218-19 (2d Cir. 2017); *Graev v. Comm’r*, 147 T.C. 460 (2016) (Gustafson, J., dissenting).

the question of when written supervisory approval must be provided.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, courts have come to conflicting conclusions about when the supervisory approval must occur:

- In 2016, the Tax Court held in *Graev v. Commissioner* (which was later vacated) that supervisory approval for penalties subject to deficiency procedures could take place at any point before the assessment was made.<sup>7</sup>
- In 2017, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit held in *Chai v. Commissioner* that supervisory approval was required for penalties subject to deficiency procedures no later than the date on which the IRS issued the notice of deficiency or, if the penalty was asserted through an answer or amended answer, the time of that filing.<sup>8</sup>
- In 2019, the Tax Court held in *Clay v. Commissioner* that supervisory approval for penalties subject to deficiency procedures was required prior to sending the taxpayer a formal communication that included the right to go to the IRS Independent Office of Appeals.<sup>9</sup>
- In 2020, the Tax Court followed *Clay* and held in *Laidlaw's Harley Davidson Sales, Inc. v. Commissioner* that the same timing rule applied to assessable penalties. However, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit overruled the Tax Court decision in 2022.<sup>10</sup> The Ninth Circuit held that approval must be obtained before assessment of the penalty or, if earlier, before the relevant supervisor loses discretion to approve the penalty assessment.

In *Belair Woods, LLC v. Commissioner*, the Tax Court found the IRS did not have to obtain supervisory approval before sending the taxpayer a Letter 1807, TEFRA Partnership Cover Letter for Summary Report, which invited the taxpayer to a closing conference to discuss proposed adjustments.<sup>11</sup> Instead, the court found that Letter 1807 only advised the taxpayer of the possibility that penalties could be proposed, and the pivotal moment requiring supervisory approval was when the IRS sent the 60-day letter formally communicating its definite decision to assert the penalties.

In September 2020, the IRS issued interim guidance that instructs employees to obtain written supervisory approval before sending a written communication that offers the taxpayer an opportunity to sign an agreement or consent to assessment or proposal of a penalty.<sup>12</sup> The interim guidance specifies that prior to obtaining written supervisory approval, employees can share written communications with the taxpayer that reflect proposed adjustments as long as they do not offer the opportunity to sign an agreement or consent to assessment or proposal of the penalty.

6 See National Taxpayer Advocate 2020 Annual Report to Congress 194 (Most Litigated Issue: *Accuracy-Related Penalty Under IRC § 6662(b)(1) and (2)*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ARC20\\_MLI\\_03\\_Accuracy.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ARC20_MLI_03_Accuracy.pdf); National Taxpayer Advocate 2019 Annual Report to Congress 149 (Most Litigated Issue: *Accuracy-Related Penalty Under IRC § 6662(b)(1) and (2)*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC19\\_Volume1\\_MLI\\_03\\_Accuracy.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC19_Volume1_MLI_03_Accuracy.pdf); National Taxpayer Advocate 2018 Annual Report to Congress 447 (Most Litigated Issue: *Accuracy-Related Penalty Under IRC § 6662(b)(1) and (2)*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ARC18\\_Volume1\\_MLI\\_01\\_AccuracyRelatedPenalty.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ARC18_Volume1_MLI_01_AccuracyRelatedPenalty.pdf).

7 147 T.C. at 460, *superseded by, in part, modified by, in part*, 149 T.C. 485 (2017).

8 851 F.3d 190 (2d Cir. 2017). In *Minemyer v. Comm'r*, 131 A.F.T.R.2d 2023-364 (10th Cir. 2023), the Tenth Circuit agreed with *Chai* that supervisory approval for a civil fraud penalty must be obtained by the date of the notice of deficiency.

9 152 T.C. 223 (2019), *aff'd on other grounds*, 990 F.3d 1296 (11th Cir. 2021).

10 *Laidlaw's Harley Davidson Sales, Inc. v. Comm'r*, 29 F.4th 1066 (9th Cir. 2022), *rev'g* 154 T.C. 68 (2020). See also *Kroner v. Comm'r*, 48 F.4th 1272 (11th Cir. 2022), *rev'g* T.C. Memo. 2020-73, in which the Eleventh Circuit agreed with the Ninth Circuit's *Laidlaw's* decision. In *Carter v. Comm'r*, 130 A.F.T.R.2d 2022-5978 (11th Cir. 2022), *rev'g* T.C. Memo. 2020-21, the Eleventh Circuit followed its decision in *Kroner*.

11 154 T.C. 1 (2020).

12 Interim Guidance Memorandum (IGM) SBSE-04-0920-0054, Timing of Supervisory Approval of Penalties Subject to IRC 6751(b) (Sept. 24, 2020), *reissued by* IGM SBSE-04-0922-0075, Reissue Interim Guidance (IG) for Timing of Supervisory Approval of Penalties Subject to IRC 6751(b) (Sept. 28, 2022), *reissued by* IGM SBSE-04-1223-0062, Interim Guidance (IG) for Timing of Supervisory Approval of Penalties Subject to IRC 6751(b) (Dec. 15, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/foia/ig/sbse/sbse-04-0922-0075.pdf>.

In 2023, the Treasury Department issued proposed regulations under IRC § 6751.<sup>13</sup> For pre-assessment penalties subject to Tax Court review, the proposed regulations would allow supervisory approval to be obtained any time before issuance of the statutory notice of deficiency. Penalties not subject to pre-assessment Tax Court review could be approved up until the time of the assessment itself. That same year and again in 2024, the Treasury Department asked Congress to amend IRC § 6751 to achieve the same result.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the proposed regulations and legislation would establish the broadest possible window and allow the requisite supervisory approval to occur at the latest possible moment. In this way, the proposed regulations and legislative proposal would bring relative certainty to this area, but they would do so by seriously eroding the taxpayer protections provided by IRC § 6751 and in opposition to the views expressed by a range of stakeholders and commentators, including the National Taxpayer Advocate.<sup>15</sup>

Both *Belair Woods* and the Treasury Department's position leave open the possibility that IRS employees could use penalties as a bargaining chip – precisely what Congress sought to prevent by enacting IRC § 6751(b). Under *Belair Woods*, IRS employees can propose penalties to induce a resolution without first obtaining written supervisory approval, so long as the communication is deemed a proposal and not a definite decision. This approach undermines the statutory intent because, as explained in the dissent in *Belair Woods*, “[e]very communication from the Commissioner proposing a deficiency and a related penalty – whether it is a preliminary report, a 30- or 60-day letter, or a notice of deficiency – sets forth proposed adjustments, which do not become final until a decision is entered, or an assessment is properly recorded.”<sup>16</sup>

The IRS's interim guidance, the proposed regulations, and the Treasury Department's legislative proposal seek to resolve the question of what is merely a proposal as opposed to a definite decision by drawing the line at written communications that offer a chance to agree to assessment or consent to proposal of a penalty. However, employees could still use penalties as a bargaining chip because some taxpayers may feel pressured to resolve their cases when penalties are first put on the table as proposed adjustments.

In addition to the timing issue, the statutory language of IRC § 6751(b)(1) is also problematic because of its focus on “assessment(s).” In *Wells Fargo & Company v. Commissioner*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit found that supervisory approval under IRC § 6751(b) was not required because there was no assessment.<sup>17</sup> The IRS asserted the accuracy-related penalty in a refund suit to offset any refund granted to the taxpayer. Because the penalty, if upheld by the court, would only lead to a reduced refund and not a balance to be assessed, the court found there would be no assessment and thus no requirement for supervisory approval.

13 Rules for Supervisory Approval of Penalties, 88 Fed. Reg. 21,564, 21,570-72 (proposed Apr. 11, 2023) (to be codified at Treas. Reg. § 301.6751(b)-1), <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2023-07232>.

14 U.S. Dep't. of the Treasury, General Explanations of the Administration's Fiscal Year 2025 Revenue Proposals 175 (Mar. 11, 2024), <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/131/General-Explanations-FY2025.pdf>; U.S. Dep't of the Treasury, General Explanations of the Administration's Fiscal Year 2024 Revenue Proposals 161-162 (Mar. 2023), <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/tax-policy/revenue-proposals>. Like the proposed regulations, Treasury's legislative proposal would expand the definition of supervisors permitted to provide the required approval. We note it is extremely unusual for the Treasury Department to simultaneously propose legislation and regulations that are substantially identical. Presumably, the General Counsel's office is uncertain whether it has the legal authority to impose a timing rule by regulation, so it is asking for a legislative change in case the courts invalidate the regulation.

15 For a more detailed discussion of the problems arising under the IRS's interpretation of IRC § 6751, see Erin M. Collins, Reconsidering the IRS's Approach to Supervisory Review, NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE BLOG (Aug. 29, 2023), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog-reconsidering-the-irs-approach-to-supervisory-review>. Stakeholder comments regarding the proposed regulations can be viewed at IRS, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Notice of Hearing, Rules for Supervisory Approval of Penalties: Hearing, IRS-002023-0016, 88 Fed. Reg. 49,397 (July 31, 2023), <https://www.regulations.gov/document/IRS-2023-0016-0010/comment>.

16 *Belair Woods, LLC v. Comm'r*, 154 T.C. 1, 11 (Jan. 6, 2020) (Marvel, J., dissenting).

17 957 F.3d 840 (8th Cir. 2020), *aff'd* 260 F. Supp. 3d 1140 (D. Minn. 2017).

In practice, the overwhelming majority of penalties imposed by the IRS are excluded from the supervisory approval requirement through one of the exceptions in IRC § 6751(b)(1).<sup>18</sup> But where written supervisory approval is required, the National Taxpayer Advocate believes it should be required early enough in the process to ensure it is meaningful and is not merely an after-the-fact rubber stamp applied in the cases in which a taxpayer challenges a proposed penalty.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6751(b)(1) to clarify that no penalty under Title 26 shall be assessed or entered in a final judicial decision unless the penalty is personally approved (in writing) by the immediate supervisor of the individual making such determination or such higher-level official as the Secretary may designate, prior to the first time the IRS sends a written communication to the taxpayer proposing the penalty as an adjustment.

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<sup>18</sup> In fiscal year 2023, the IRS imposed 38.2 million penalties on individuals, estates, and trusts in connection with income tax liabilities. The following penalties, generally imposed by electronic means, accounted for over 98 percent of the total: failure-to-pay (18.6 million), failure-to-pay estimated tax (14.2 million), failure-to-file (3.3 million), and bad checks (1.4 million). IRS, Pub. 55-B, 2023 IRS Data Book, Table 28, Civil Penalties Assessed and Abated, by Type of Tax and Type of Penalty, Fiscal Year 2023, at 62 (2024), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p55b.pdf>.

**Legislative Recommendation #34****Require an Employee to Determine and a Supervisor to Approve All Negligence Penalties Under IRC § 6662(b)(1)****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The tax code generally requires supervisory approval before the IRS may assess a penalty, but it provides an exception for penalties that may be automatically calculated and do not require employee judgment. The IRS currently takes the position that the negligence penalty can sometimes be automatically calculated and applied, but whether a taxpayer acted negligently requires an assessment of the taxpayer's conduct and state of mind, which a computer cannot make. As a result, the IRS is imposing the negligence penalty in cases where the taxpayer was not negligent.
- *Solution:* Do not allow the IRS to impose the negligence penalty by automation, absent employee review and supervisory approval.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6662(b)(1) imposes a penalty equal to 20 percent of any underpayment of tax required to be shown on a tax return that is attributable to negligence or disregard of rules or regulations. IRC § 6662(c) defines negligence to include “any failure to make a reasonable attempt to comply with the provisions of this title” and disregard to include “any careless, reckless, or intentional disregard.”

IRC § 6751(b)(1) provides: “No penalty under this title shall be assessed unless the initial determination of such assessment is personally approved (in writing) by the immediate supervisor of the individual making such determination or such higher level official as the Secretary may designate.”<sup>1</sup> IRC § 6751(b)(2) carves out two categories of exceptions from this supervisory approval requirement:

- The additions to tax for failure to file a tax return or pay the tax due (IRC § 6651), the additions to tax for failure to pay sufficient estimated tax (IRC §§ 6654 and 6655), and the penalty for the overstatement or disallowance of certain charitable contribution deductions (IRC § 6662(b)(9) and (10)); and
- Any other penalty that is “automatically calculated through electronic means.”<sup>2</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

IRC § 6751 states that the initial determination of penalties must be personally approved (in writing) by the immediate supervisor of the individual making the initial determination, subject to the exceptions described above. In the significant majority of cases, the IRS imposes penalties by electronic means because it is easier

1 The meaning of “initial determination of such assessment” and the timing required for approval have been the subject of litigation. See, e.g., *Belair Woods v. Comm’r*, 154 T.C. 1 (2020). For a recommendation to clarify the timing, see *Clarify That Supervisory Approval Is Required Under IRC § 6751(b) Before Proposing Penalties*, *supra*.

2 Generally, a penalty is considered automatically calculated through electronic means if the penalty is proposed by an IRS computer program without human involvement. See, e.g., *Walquist v. Comm’r*, 152 T.C. 61 (2019).

and cheaper to do so.<sup>3</sup> Where the imposition of a penalty is mechanical, such as the penalties for failure to file, failure to pay, or failure to pay estimated tax, that approach is justifiable.

However, imposition of a penalty for “negligence or disregard of rules or regulations” is different. To determine whether a taxpayer made a reasonable attempt to comply with the law, an employee must analyze the taxpayer’s state of mind, the actions the taxpayer took to comply, and the taxpayer’s motivations for taking those actions. A computer cannot perform this analysis.

Nevertheless, Treas. Reg. § 1.6662-3(b)(1)(i) states that negligence is strongly indicated when a taxpayer omits income reported on an information return from his or her income tax return. In reliance on this regulation, the IRS has programmed its computers to calculate certain negligence penalties automatically as part of its Automated Underreporter (AUR) program. For example, the AUR system proposes the negligence penalty where IRS data suggests the taxpayer failed to report income reflected on a third-party information return for a second tax year in a row.<sup>4</sup>

Legal advice from the Office of Chief Counsel goes further, concluding that “in the absence of any other evidence suggesting the failure was not negligent, it is appropriate to propose and subsequently assess an accuracy-related penalty for negligence when a taxpayer does not include on an income tax return an amount of income shown on an information return.”<sup>5</sup>

However, the AUR system in this scenario solely checks for the presence of information returns and unreported income. It cannot determine there is no other evidence that would rebut the negligence finding, such as whether the information return was mailed to a different address than the one used by the taxpayer when filing the return or whether the information return contained an error. Before the IRS can reasonably conclude that a taxpayer acted negligently, an employee must review the case to consider facts and circumstances that may suggest the taxpayer did not act negligently.

Although the AUR program and proposed regulations do require supervisory approval for the negligence penalty if the taxpayer submits a response to the notice issued through the AUR program,<sup>6</sup> there are many reasons a taxpayer may not respond. A taxpayer may have moved and not received the notice. A taxpayer may have put the notice aside and not replied before the response deadline. Or a taxpayer may have accepted the proposed tax adjustment without realizing that he or she must respond to avoid the penalty assessment.

In these and other circumstances, taxpayers may face a penalty for negligence without any analysis into their reasonable attempts to comply with the tax laws. Allowing a computer to determine negligence without employee involvement harms taxpayers and undermines the protections afforded by IRC § 6751(b). The Treasury Department has made a legislative proposal that would perpetuate this harm by definitively

3 In fiscal year 2023, the IRS imposed 38.2 million penalties on individuals, estates, and trusts in connection with income tax liabilities. The following penalties, generally imposed by electronic means, accounted for over 98 percent of the total: failure to pay (18.6 million), failure to pay estimated tax (14.2 million), failure to file (3.3 million), and bad checks (1.5 million). IRS, Pub. 55-B, 2023 IRS Data Book, Table 28, Civil Penalties Assessed and Abated, by Type of Tax and Type of Penalty, Fiscal Year 2023, at 62 (2024), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p55b.pdf>.

4 Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) 4.19.3.22.1.4, Accuracy-Related Penalties (Sept. 21, 2020), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm\\_04-019-003r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm_04-019-003r).

5 IRS, Program Manager Technical Advice 2008-01249, Accuracy Related Penalties and Automated Underreporter Program (Oct. 22, 2007), [https://www.irs.gov/pub/iranoa/pmta01249\\_7337.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/iranoa/pmta01249_7337.pdf).

6 IRM 4.19.3.22.1.4, Accuracy-Related Penalties (Sept. 21, 2020), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm\\_04-019-003r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm_04-019-003r); Rules for Supervisory Approval of Penalties, 88 Fed. Reg. 21,564, 21,570 (to be codified at Treas. Reg. § 301.6751(b)-1(a)(3)(vi) (proposed Apr. 11, 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2023-07232>.

removing all IRC § 6662 penalties, including negligence penalties, from the supervisory review and approval requirement.<sup>7</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6751(b)(2)(B) to clarify that the exception for “other penalties automatically calculated through electronic means” does not apply to the penalty for negligence or disregard of rules or regulations under IRC § 6662(b)(1).

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Dep’t. of the Treasury, General Explanations of the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2025 Revenue Proposals 175 (Mar. 11, 2024), <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/131/General-Explanations-FY2025.pdf>; U.S. Dep’t of the Treasury, General Explanations of the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2024 Revenue Proposals 161-162 (2023), <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/tax-policy/revenue-proposals>.

**Legislative Recommendation #35****Modify the Definition of “Willful” for Purposes of Determining Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts Violations and Reduce the Maximum Penalty Amounts****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Penalties for failure to disclose foreign assets on a Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts (FBAR) are steep and grow even steeper when the IRS determines a taxpayer’s failure was “willful.” The IRS has become increasingly aggressive in asserting that taxpayers’ failures to file are willful, which can lead to draconian penalties for good-faith errors.
- *Solution:* Increase the burden of proof on the IRS for declaring a failure “willful” and reduce the maximum penalty for willful violations involving small accounts.

**PRESENT LAW**

The Bank Secrecy Act requires U.S. citizens, residents, and entities to report foreign accounts to the Treasury Department’s Financial Criminal Enforcement Network (FinCEN) when the combined value of those accounts exceeds \$10,000 at any time during the calendar year.<sup>1</sup> They must do so on FinCEN Form 114, Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts (FBAR).

31 U.S.C. § 5321(a)(5) imposes civil penalties for failing to report the accounts. The penalty amount depends on whether the failure was non-willful or willful. For a non-willful violation, the maximum civil penalty is \$10,000 (adjusted for inflation), subject to a reasonable cause exception.<sup>2</sup> Under 31 U.S.C. § 5321(a)(5)(C)(i), the maximum civil penalty for a willful violation is the greater of \$100,000 (adjusted for inflation) or 50 percent of the account balance at the time of the violation. For violations occurring over multiple years, the IRS has adopted a policy, set forth in the Internal Revenue Manual (IRM), that limits the total amount of penalties to 50 percent of the highest aggregate balance of all unreported foreign accounts for all years under examination, which can be increased to 100 percent for willful violations.<sup>3</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

The maximum FBAR penalty is among the harshest civil penalties the government may impose.

FBAR penalties are so steep there is debate about whether they violate the prohibition against excessive fines in the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.<sup>4</sup> In August 2024, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit held that the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition against excessive fines applies to FBAR penalties and partially reduced the taxpayer’s penalty after finding it was “grossly disproportionate” to the offense of failing to disclose the foreign account.<sup>5</sup> This decision creates a split among the circuits, as the U.S.

1 31 U.S.C. § 5314; 31 C.F.R. § 1010.350.

2 31 U.S.C. § 5321(a)(5)(B)(i); *see also Bittner v. United States*, 598 U.S. 85 (2023) (holding that the \$10,000 cap applies on a per-FBAR report, not per-account, basis).

3 IRM 4.26.16.5.4.1, Penalty for Non-willful Violations – Calculation (June 24, 2021), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm\\_04-026-016](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm_04-026-016); IRM 4.26.16.5.5.3, Penalty for Willful FBAR Violations – Calculation (June 24, 2021), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm\\_04-026-016](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm_04-026-016).

4 *See, e.g.,* Matthew A. Melone, *Penalties for the Failure to Report Foreign Financial Accounts and the Excessive Fines Clause of the Eighth Amendment*, 22 GEO. MASON L. REV. 337 (2015).

5 *United States v. Schwarzbaum*, 114 F.4th 1319 (11th Cir. 2024).

Court of Appeals for the First Circuit held in 2022 that the Eighth Amendment does not apply to FBAR penalties.<sup>6</sup>

An example illustrates the potential severity of the FBAR penalties, particularly for smaller accounts. Assume an account holder maintains a balance of \$25,000 in a foreign account that they willfully fail to report. The IRS may, under the statute, impose a penalty of over \$100,000 per year (the exact amount depends on the year since the \$100,000 is adjusted for inflation) and may go back six years, producing an aggregate statutory maximum penalty of over \$600,000. While the IRS should not impose such a severe penalty under the IRM, the IRM is simply a set of instructions to help IRS employees do their jobs. It is not binding and can be changed at any time.

In this example, the penalty exceeds the account balance because the statute provides that the maximum penalty is the *greater of* \$100,000 (adjusted for inflation) or 50 percent of the account balance. The \$100,000 cap only applies to accounts with balances below \$200,000 like the one in the example; for higher balance accounts, the maximum statutory penalty is limited to 50 percent of the account balance. The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends Congress address this disparity by limiting the maximum statutory penalty for a willful FBAR violation to 50 percent of the account balance for all accounts.

While the distinction between willful and non-willful violations makes sense in concept, its application can lead to unduly harsh results. If the IRS chooses to assert a violation was willful, it is very difficult for a taxpayer to prevail. One reason is because Form 1040, U.S. Individual Income Tax Return, includes Schedule B, which is titled “Interest and Ordinary Dividends” and is used by taxpayers to report such income. Schedule B contains a question at the bottom that asks whether the taxpayer has a foreign account and references the FBAR filing requirement. The IRS has argued, and some courts have agreed, that since taxpayers are presumed to know the contents of their return when they sign it under penalty of perjury, a failure to file an FBAR form is willful where a taxpayer filed a tax return that includes Schedule B (because it mentions the FBAR filing requirement).<sup>7</sup> Further making it difficult for taxpayers to prevail is that courts generally have allowed the government to prove willfulness in FBAR cases by a “preponderance of the evidence,” rather than requiring the government to meet the higher standard of “clear and convincing” evidence, which is typically the standard in tax fraud cases.<sup>8</sup>

These practices are unfair to taxpayers. Tax forms and instructions contain a lot of verbiage, and few if any taxpayers have a complete understanding of all lines, questions, and instructions on a return or schedule – or even read them all. Additionally, it is common for individuals who have lived in foreign countries or have immigrated to the United States to maintain foreign bank accounts, and they may overlook the reporting requirement for benign reasons.

Account holders who do not file FBAR forms due to negligence, inadvertence, or similar causes are appropriately subject to penalties for non-willful violations, which have a reasonable cause exception. But they should not face uncertainty regarding possible application of the harsh penalties for willful violations. The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends Congress clarify that the IRS must prove a violation was willful without relying on the Schedule B or its instructions and must do so by clear and convincing evidence.

6 *United States v. Toth*, 33 F.4<sup>th</sup> 1, 15-19 (1<sup>st</sup> Cir. 2022), *cert. denied*, 143 S.Ct. 552 (2023).

7 Not all courts have accepted the IRS’s argument. For two recent examples discussing key cases in this area, see *United States v. Saydam*, No. 22-cv-07371-DMR, 2024, WL 3407677 (N.D. Cal. July 12, 2024) and *United States v. Niksich*, No. 1:22-CV-02411-SCJ2024, WL 3915240 (N.D. Ga. July 8, 2024).

8 See, e.g., *United States v. Vettel*, No. 4:21CV3099, 2024 WL 2012352 (D. Neb. Apr. 11, 2024); *United States v. Reyes*, 133 A.F.T.R.2d 2024-468 (E.D.N.Y. 2024); *United States v. Garrity*, 304 F. Supp. 3d 267 (D. Conn. 2018); *United States v. Bohanec*, 263 F. Supp. 3d 881 (C.D. Cal. 2016); *United States v. McBride*, 908 F. Supp. 2d 1186 (D. Utah 2012).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Clarify that the government has the burden to establish willfulness by clear and convincing evidence before asserting a civil willful FBAR penalty and that the government cannot meet this burden by relying on the Schedule B attached to a return.
- Remove subsection (I) in 31 U.S.C. § 5321(a)(5)(C)(i) so that the maximum statutory civil penalty for a willful FBAR violation is 50 percent of the account balance at the time of the violation.

## STRENGTHEN TAXPAYER RIGHTS BEFORE THE OFFICE OF APPEALS

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### Legislative Recommendation #36

## Require Taxpayers' Consent Before Allowing IRS Counsel or Compliance Personnel to Participate in Appeals Conferences

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* The IRS Independent Office of Appeals (Appeals) has adopted a policy, particularly in large cases, of including Counsel and Compliance personnel in taxpayer conferences, even if the taxpayer objects to their participation. When the IRS permits Counsel or Compliance to attend conferences over the objections of taxpayers whose cases are not docketed for litigation, it jeopardizes taxpayer rights and compromises the independence of Appeals.
- *Solution:* Codify the right of taxpayers in nondocketed cases to an administrative appeal without the presence of personnel from Counsel or Compliance.<sup>1</sup>

### PRESENT LAW

As part of the Taxpayer First Act of 2019, Congress codified the IRS's longstanding Appeals function as the "Internal Revenue Service Independent Office of Appeals."<sup>2</sup> The intent of the codification was to "reassure taxpayers of the independence" of Appeals.<sup>3</sup> But present law does not directly address the inclusion of personnel from the IRS Office of Chief Counsel or the IRS compliance functions in conferences held by Appeals.<sup>4</sup>

### REASONS FOR CHANGE

Historically, Counsel and Compliance provided input into Appeals conferences via the case file and, if the case was particularly large or complex, at a pre-conference. The Appeals conference itself generally was devoted to presentation of the taxpayer's case and settlement negotiations between the taxpayer (or the taxpayer's representative) and the Appeals Officer. Counsel and Compliance personnel rarely attended such conferences, leaving taxpayers and Appeals Officers free to develop rapport, seek common ground, and pursue case resolution – consistent with Appeals' mission of operating independently from the rest of the IRS.<sup>5</sup>

In October 2016, Appeals revised provisions of the Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) to allow Appeals Officers to include personnel from Counsel and Compliance in Appeals conferences.<sup>6</sup> Counsel and Compliance are

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1 We are not recommending this change for cases pending in the U.S. Tax Court. In docketed cases, the taxpayer has already filed a petition in the Tax Court seeking judicial review of an adverse IRS determination, and the Office of Chief Counsel has already become involved with the case in defending the IRS's position.

2 Taxpayer First Act, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1001, 133 Stat. 981, 983 (2019) (codified at IRC § 7803(e)).

3 H.R. REP. NO. 116-39, pt. 1, at 29 (2019) (accompanying H.R. 1957, which was enacted into law without change to this provision as H.R. 3151). In 2012, the IRS published Revenue Procedure 2012-18, which, among other things, places parameters around *ex parte* communications between Appeals and other representatives of the IRS, such as Counsel and Compliance. This guidance is premised on a recognition that Appeals must be unbiased and impartial, both in fact and in appearance.

4 IRC § 7803(e)(6)(B) provides the Chief of Appeals with authority to obtain legal assistance and advice from the staff of the IRS Office of Chief Counsel.

5 For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2023 Annual Report to Congress 132 (Most Serious Problem: Appeals: Despite Some Improvements, Many Taxpayers and Tax Professionals Continue to Perceive the IRS Independent Office of Appeals as Insufficiently Independent), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ARC23\\_MSP\\_10\\_Appeals.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ARC23_MSP_10_Appeals.pdf).

6 IRM 8.6.1.5.4, Participation in Conferences by IRS Employees (Oct. 1, 2016), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part8/irm\\_08-006-001r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part8/irm_08-006-001r).

not parties to the settlement discussions, which occur near the conclusion of the conference, but Appeals' procedures nonetheless give these non-parties the opportunity to present an oral argument and question taxpayers and their representatives.

Under these procedures, an Appeals Officer may invite the additional participants regardless of whether the taxpayer agrees or objects to their presence. Appeals has agreed to solicit and consider the views of taxpayers before inviting Counsel and Compliance to attend a conference but has stopped short of making taxpayer consent a prerequisite for such attendance.<sup>7</sup>

Including Counsel and Compliance personnel in nondocketed case conferences without the consent of the taxpayer runs contrary to the purpose of an independent Appeals conference, which is neither to give Compliance personnel another bite at the apple nor to transform Appeals into a mediation forum; the IRS's position is already documented in the case file the Appeals Officer reviews. Instead, the mission and credibility of Appeals rest on its ability to undertake direct and unbiased settlement negotiations with taxpayers and their representatives, independent of the Counsel and Compliance functions.

The expansion of Appeals conferences to include Counsel and Compliance personnel alters the relationship between taxpayers and Appeals Officers. It makes interactions less negotiation-based and transforms the conference into a more contentious and one-sided proceeding. This approach is also seemingly inconsistent with Congress's intent to "reassure taxpayers of the independence" of Appeals.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 7803(e) to provide that a taxpayer shall have the right to a conference with the Independent Office of Appeals that does not include personnel from the Office of Chief Counsel or the compliance functions of the IRS in cases that have not been docketed in the Tax Court, unless the taxpayer specifically consents to the participation of those parties in the conference.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> IRS Independent Office of Appeals, Appeals Team Case Leader Conferencing Initiative: Summary of Findings and Next Steps (Sept. 2021).

<sup>8</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Protecting Taxpayers Act, S. 3278, 115th Cong. § 601 (2018). This recommendation is not intended to limit the ability of Appeals to obtain legal assistance and advice from the Office of Chief Counsel, as permitted by IRC § 7803(e)(6)(B).

## STRENGTHEN THE OFFICE OF THE TAXPAYER ADVOCATE

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### Legislative Recommendation #37

## Clarify That the National Taxpayer Advocate May Hire Legal Counsel to Enable Her to Advocate More Effectively for Taxpayers

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* In advocating for taxpayer rights and developing an independent position on matters that affect taxpayers both individually and collectively, the National Taxpayer Advocate often requires independent legal advice. Prior to 2015, the IRS permitted the National Taxpayer Advocate to hire her own attorneys. Since that time, the IRS has prohibited her from hiring attorneys, undermining her ability to do her job effectively.
- *Solution:* Authorize the National Taxpayer Advocate to hire attorneys who report directly to her.

### PRESENT LAW

Pursuant to 31 U.S.C. § 301(f), the General Counsel of the Department of the Treasury is the chief law officer for the Department. The IRS Chief Counsel is an Assistant General Counsel and the chief law officer for the IRS. With a few exceptions, Treasury Department Order 107-04 provides that all attorneys in the Treasury Department must work in the Legal Division and report to the General Counsel.<sup>1</sup> Treasury's inspectors general and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) are excluded from this requirement based on specific statutory language in 5 U.S.C. App. III § 3(g) and 12 U.S.C. § 482, respectively, and therefore are authorized to hire and supervise their own attorneys.<sup>2</sup> No law specifically authorizes the National Taxpayer Advocate to hire and supervise attorneys. However, IRC § 7803(c) makes clear that TAS is expected to operate independently of the IRS in key respects. A few examples:

- IRC § 7803(c)(2)(A) directs TAS to assist taxpayers in resolving problems with the IRS, to identify areas in which taxpayers have problems in their dealings with the IRS, and to make administrative and legislative recommendations to mitigate such problems.
- IRC § 7803(c)(4)(A) requires each local taxpayer advocate to notify taxpayers that its offices "operate independently of any other Internal Revenue Service office and report directly to Congress through the National Taxpayer Advocate."
- IRC § 7803(c)(2)(B)(iii) requires the National Taxpayer Advocate to submit reports to Congress directly "without any prior review or comment from ... the Commissioner, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Oversight Board, any other officer or employee of the Department of the Treasury, or the Office of Management and Budget." This provision is similar to the one that applies to the OCC (12 U.S.C. § 250).

1 Treas. Order 107-04 states: "With the exception of persons employed by the Treasury Inspector General, TIGTA, SIGTARP, SIGPR, or the Chief Counsel of the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, all attorneys whose duties include providing legal advice to officials in any office or bureau of the Department are part of the Legal Division under the supervision of the General Counsel."

2 The Inspector General Act of 1978 (codified as amended at 5 U.S.C. § 403(g)) provides: "Each Inspector General shall, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations governing the civil service, obtain legal advice from a counsel either reporting directly to the Inspector General or another Inspector General." Similarly, 12 U.S.C. § 482 provides: "Notwithstanding any of the provisions of section 481 of this title or section 301(f)(1) of title 31 to the contrary, the Comptroller of the Currency shall, subject to chapter 71 of title 5, fix the compensation and number of, and appoint and direct, all employees of the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency."

When Congress reorganized the IRS in 1998, it recognized that the National Taxpayer Advocate requires independent counsel to advocate for her positions. The version of the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998 passed by the Senate contained the following authorization: “The National Taxpayer Advocate shall have the responsibility and authority to . . . appoint a counsel in the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate to report directly to the National Taxpayer Advocate.”<sup>3</sup> In explaining the provision, Senator Grassley said: “In order to make the Taxpayer Advocate more independent, which is what this bill does, it logically follows that the Taxpayer Advocate should have its own legal counsel.”<sup>4</sup>

This provision was not included in the final bill. However, the conference report stated that the “conferees intend that the National Taxpayer Advocate be able to hire and consult counsel as appropriate.”<sup>5</sup>

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

Beginning in 2004, with the approval of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, TAS hired and employed attorney-advisors. The National Taxpayer Advocate requires independent attorney-advisors because she often takes positions, both in working taxpayer cases and in systemic advocacy, that are directly contrary to the position of the IRS and the Office of Chief Counsel.

Once attorneys in the Office of Chief Counsel have adopted a legal position interpreting a law or regulation for purposes of IRS operations, procedures, or litigation, it would be unrealistic to expect those same attorneys to effectively help the National Taxpayer Advocate develop a legal position that challenges their own interpretation, or an interpretation adopted by the Chief Counsel organization for which they work. Notably, the Chief Counsel organization requires its attorneys to reconcile disputes internally so that they ultimately all “speak with one voice.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, although the National Taxpayer Advocate sometimes receives legal advice from Chief Counsel attorneys, the advice is not independent from the advice they provide to the rest of the IRS. By contrast, TAS’s own attorney-advisors have enabled the National Taxpayer Advocate to develop an independent perspective and advocate independently for taxpayers, as the law intends.

In 2015, the IRS for the first time denied a routine TAS request to backfill existing attorney positions due to attrition. It cited Treasury Department General Counsel Directive No. 2, which states: “Except for positions in the Inspectors General offices or within the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, attorney positions shall not be established outside of the Legal Division” unless the General Counsel or Deputy General Counsel(s) provides a waiver. On November 29, 2016, the National Taxpayer Advocate submitted a nine-page memo to the Acting General Counsel requesting permission to continue to hire attorney-advisors. It asked the Acting General Counsel to modify General Counsel Directive No. 2 to add a carve-out for the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate, as it does for the Inspectors General offices. Alternatively, the National Taxpayer Advocate orally requested that a “waiver” be granted, as provided in the directive. TAS subsequently submitted another hiring request, and it was again denied by the IRS.

3 H.R. 2676, 105th Cong. § 1102(a) (as passed by the Senate, May 7, 1998).

4 44 CONG. REC. 8476 (1998). The provision was added to the bill as an amendment sponsored by Senator Grassley on the Senate floor.

5 H.R. REP. NO. 105-599, at 216 (1998) (Conf. Rep.). In 2003, the House passed legislation with nearly identical language. It would have authorized the National Taxpayer Advocate to “appoint a counsel in the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate to report solely to the National Taxpayer Advocate.” See Taxpayer Protection and IRS Accountability Act of 2003, H.R. 1528, 108th Cong. § 306 (2003) (as passed by the House, June 19, 2003). The legislation was sponsored by then-Cong. Rob Portman, who had previously been the lead House sponsor of the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998. It would have added this language as a new subsection (III) to IRC § 7803(c)(2)(D)(i). Although the authorization was not enacted into law, it bears mention that the Senate in 1998 and the House in 2003 approved virtually identical provisions of the legislation, suggesting the RRA 98 conference report language cited above had significant congressional support.

6 See Chief Counsel Directives Manual (CCDM) 35.4.1.4, Coordination with Other Counsel Offices (Feb. 7, 2013), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part35/irm\\_35-004-001](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part35/irm_35-004-001); CCDM 31.1.4.6, Reconciliation of Disputes (Aug. 11, 2004), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part31/irm\\_31-001-004](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part31/irm_31-001-004).

The inability of the National Taxpayer Advocate to hire attorney-advisors extends to announcing higher graded positions for attorneys currently working in TAS. Therefore, TAS is barred from both hiring new attorneys and promoting well-performing attorneys to higher-graded positions. This has accelerated attrition. If the National Taxpayer Advocate is not able to hire attorney-advisors, TAS's ability to advocate for taxpayers both individually and collectively and the National Taxpayer Advocate's ability to produce high-quality reports to Congress will be significantly compromised. The National Taxpayer Advocate believes the conference report language stating that the "conferees intend that the National Taxpayer Advocate be able to hire and consult counsel as appropriate" provides a sufficient legal basis for her to hire attorneys who report to her. The General Counsel has disagreed, maintaining that a statutory change is required.<sup>7</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 7803(c)(2)(D) to expressly authorize the National Taxpayer Advocate to hire legal counsel who report directly to him or her.<sup>8</sup>

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7 As an interim measure, the National Taxpayer Advocate has hired attorneys into a non-attorney job series. While the National Taxpayer Advocate is very proud of the staff she has, TAS's inability to hire attorneys into the attorney-advisor job series has significantly limited the pool of qualified candidates who apply, particularly from leading law firms. The job series the IRS has authorized TAS to use is titled "Legal Administrative Specialist." Many skilled attorneys seeking to maximize their future employment prospects in the legal profession want to work in an attorney-designated position and are reluctant to apply for an "administrative specialist" position. Moreover, individuals searching for attorney positions on USAJobs.gov would be unlikely even to come across a "Legal Administrative Specialist" position.

8 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see National Taxpayer Advocate Enhancement Act, H.R. 2755, 118<sup>th</sup> Cong. (2023). For more detail, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2016 Annual Report to Congress 37 (Special Focus: *Provide the National Taxpayer Advocate the Authority to Hire Independent Counsel, Comment on Regulations, and File Amicus Briefs in Litigation Raising Taxpayer Rights Issues*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC16\\_Volume1\\_SpecialFocus.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC16_Volume1_SpecialFocus.pdf) (recommending that Congress "[a]uthorize the National Taxpayer Advocate to appoint independent counsel who report directly to the National Taxpayer Advocate, provide independent legal advice, help prepare *amicus curiae* briefs and comments on proposed or temporary regulations, and assist the National Taxpayer Advocate in preparing the Annual Report to Congress and in advocating for taxpayers individually and systemically"); National Taxpayer Advocate 2002 Annual Report to Congress 198 (Legislative Recommendation: *The Office of the Taxpayer Advocate*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/arc2002\\_section\\_two.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/arc2002_section_two.pdf).

**Legislative Recommendation #38****Clarify the Authority of the National Taxpayer Advocate to Make Personnel Decisions to Protect the Independence of the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* To protect the independence of TAS, the tax code authorizes the National Taxpayer Advocate to take independent personnel actions with respect to employees of local TAS offices. The tax code does not provide this authority with respect to national office TAS employees, yet national office TAS employees who advocate for systemic changes in IRS practices and policies are most likely to take positions in conflict with IRS leadership and therefore require personnel protection.
- *Solution:* Clarify that the National Taxpayer Advocate has the authority to take independent personnel actions with respect to all TAS employees.

**PRESENT LAW**

The IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998 (RRA 98) included provisions to protect TAS's independence from the rest of the IRS. For example, IRC § 7803(c)(4)(A)(iii) requires local TAS offices to notify taxpayers that they “operate independently of any other Internal Revenue Service office and report directly to Congress through the National Taxpayer Advocate.” To reinforce TAS's independence, IRC § 7803(c)(2)(D) authorizes the National Taxpayer Advocate to “appoint” local taxpayer advocates in each state and to “evaluate and take personnel actions (including dismissal) with respect to any employee of any local office.”

The National Taxpayer Advocate's authority to make independent personnel decisions is discussed in the legislative history of RRA 98. The conference report states that the National Taxpayer Advocate “has the responsibility to evaluate and take personnel actions (including dismissal) with respect to *any local Taxpayer Advocate or any employee in the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate.*”<sup>1</sup> Thus, there is clear inconsistency between the conference report and the statute. The conference report states the statute gives the National Taxpayer Advocate the authority to make independent personnel decisions regarding all TAS employees, but the statute confers that authority only with respect to employees of TAS's local offices.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

IRC § 7803(c)(2)(A) assigns the National Taxpayer Advocate two principal responsibilities: (i) to advocate for taxpayers in specific cases (case advocacy) and (ii) to advocate for administrative and legislative changes to resolve problems that affect groups of taxpayers or all taxpayers (systemic advocacy). While the conference report language indicates Congress intended to give the National Taxpayer Advocate independent personnel authority over all TAS employees engaged in both advocacy functions, the statute as written only covers employees of TAS local offices, who primarily engage in case advocacy. Currently, the National Taxpayer Advocate does not have independent personnel authority over TAS's senior leadership, TAS's attorney-advisors, employees of TAS's systemic advocacy and research functions, and other national office employees,

<sup>1</sup> H.R. REP. NO. 105-599, at 214 (1998) (Conf. Rep.) (emphasis added). The report states that the conference committee adopted the Senate amendment with respect to the National Taxpayer Advocate provisions, except as modified. H.R. REP. NO. 105-599, at 216 (1998) (Conf. Rep.). The Senate bill and report contained the same inconsistency as the conference bill and report. See H.R. 2676, 105th Cong. § 1102 (as passed by the Senate, May 7, 1998); S. REP. NO. 105-174, at 23 (1998).

even though these employees also advocate independently on behalf of taxpayers, have the same potential conflicts, and face the same potential retaliatory personnel actions that Congress sought to address in 1998.

The rationale for authorizing the National Taxpayer Advocate to make independent personnel decisions for TAS's national office employees is, in key respects, more compelling than the rationale for TAS's local office employees. National office employees primarily advocate for systemic change in IRS practices and policies, often placing them in direct conflict with IRS senior officials.

This concern is not merely theoretical. In recent years, IRS executives have reviewed and approved performance ratings for TAS's senior leaders. This creates the potential for TAS leaders perceived by the IRS as "team players" to be given better performance ratings and bonus awards than TAS leaders perceived to be more assertive in their advocacy. For the same reasons it would be inappropriate for IRS leaders to evaluate and make salary and bonus award determinations for Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration employees, the IRS's ability to influence the careers of TAS's employees has the potential to undermine TAS's independence.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- Amend IRC § 7803(c)(2)(D) to clarify that the National Taxpayer Advocate shall have the authority to take personnel actions with respect to all TAS employees.

**Legislative Recommendation #39****Clarify the Taxpayer Advocate Service's Access to Files, Meetings, and Other Information****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The IRS has occasionally refused to provide the National Taxpayer Advocate with information she requires to do her job of advocating for taxpayers and prevented TAS employees from attending IRS conferences with taxpayers who have open TAS cases and have requested TAS attendance.
- *Solution:* Require the IRS to give the National Taxpayer Advocate and her staff access to all IRS information relevant to TAS's duties and require the IRS to allow TAS personnel to participate in taxpayer conferences when requested by taxpayers.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7803(c)(2) requires TAS to assist taxpayers in resolving problems with the IRS, identify areas in which taxpayers are experiencing problems in their dealings with the IRS, make administrative and legislative recommendations to mitigate those problems, and submit two reports to Congress each year. IRC § 6103 generally prohibits the disclosure of tax returns or return information, but IRC § 6103(h) provides that “returns and return information shall, without written request, be open to inspection by or disclosure to officers and employees of the Department of the Treasury whose official duties require such inspection or disclosure for tax administration purposes.”

TAS employees are authorized by IRC § 6103(h) to review tax return information because their statutory duties require this access. In furtherance of their duties, they may also need to attend meetings between taxpayers or their representatives and other IRS employees and obtain other information from the IRS. Similarly, the National Taxpayer Advocate requires information to analyze systemic problems and provide Congress with a “full and substantive analysis” of such problems in her annual reports to Congress, as required by IRC § 7803(c)(2)(B). However, the law does not expressly state that the National Taxpayer Advocate is authorized to access return information, attend meetings with IRS or Office of Chief Counsel employees, or obtain other information from the IRS or the Office of Chief Counsel.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

In general, the National Taxpayer Advocate has significant access to IRS systems and data.<sup>1</sup> However, the IRS has sometimes declined to provide TAS with access to (1) audit files of taxpayers with cases open in TAS; (2) meetings between the IRS and taxpayers with cases open in TAS, even when a taxpayer has requested TAS's attendance; (3) advice that the Office of Chief Counsel has provided to other business units; and (4) information required by the National Taxpayer Advocate to enable her to analyze systemic problems for

<sup>1</sup> Nina E. Olson, *Institutionalizing Advocacy: Some Reflections on the Taxpayer Advocate Service's Evolution as an Advocate for Taxpayers*, 18 PITT. TAX REV. 11, at 19 (2020) (“In House and Senate hearings, members of Congress struggled to come up with the right design, one that would balance the office's need to be inside the IRS so as to have immediate access to information and planning, with the unrelenting pressure to conform to the IRS leadership's point of view.”), <https://taxreview.law.pitt.edu/ojs/taxreview/article/view/122/194>.

reports to Congress.<sup>2</sup> Lack of access undermines TAS's ability to fully advocate for taxpayers, both individually and collectively.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend IRC § 7803(c) to clarify that for any cases open and pending in TAS, the National Taxpayer Advocate (and authorized TAS employees) are authorized to participate in meetings between taxpayers and employees of the IRS or the Office of Chief Counsel, at the taxpayer's request; and the National Taxpayer Advocate (and authorized TAS employees) shall have access to tax returns, return information, administrative files, and legal advice provided by the Office of Chief Counsel to any IRS employee.
- Amend IRC § 7803(c) to clarify that, in furtherance of her tax administrative duties, the National Taxpayer Advocate (and authorized TAS employees) shall have access to all data, statistical information, legal advice provided by the Office of Chief Counsel to any IRS employee, and documents necessary to perform a "full and substantive analysis" of the issues, as required by IRC § 7803(c)(2)(B).<sup>3</sup>

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2 See, e.g., National Taxpayer Advocate 2018 Annual Report to Congress 42 (Most Serious Problem: *Transparency of the Office of Chief Counsel: Counsel Is Keeping More of Its Analysis Secret, Just When Taxpayers Need Guidance More Than Ever*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ARC18\\_Volume1\\_MSP\\_02\\_TransparencyOCC.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ARC18_Volume1_MSP_02_TransparencyOCC.pdf); National Taxpayer Advocate 2016 Annual Report to Congress 34 (Special Focus: *Reinforce the National Taxpayer Advocate's Right of Access to Taxpayer and IRS Information and to Meetings Between the IRS and Taxpayers*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC16\\_Volume1\\_SpecialFocus.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC16_Volume1_SpecialFocus.pdf).

3 This recommendation is not intended to create a waiver of privilege with respect to information the IRS may lawfully keep confidential. When TAS receives information from the IRS, it protects the information from disclosure if it is privileged. Under the Taxpayer First Act of 2019, the Secretary is now required to provide the National Taxpayer Advocate with "statistical support" for the Annual Report to Congress. Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1301(b), 133 Stat. 981, 991 (2019). However, this requirement only encompasses statistical studies, compilations, and the review of information already obtained by TAS. It does not address TAS's broader need for access to information, including the right to review case files and attend taxpayer meetings. The Taxpayer Rights Act of 2015, H.R. 4128, 114th Cong. § 403 (2015) and S. 2333, 114th Cong. § 403 (2015), would have granted TAS access to case-related files and meetings, but it did not address TAS's need for access to information required to report on systemic issues.

**Legislative Recommendation #40****Authorize the National Taxpayer Advocate to File *Amicus* Briefs****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* When a federal court is deciding a case that may affect the rights of many or all taxpayers, the court would benefit if the National Taxpayer Advocate were authorized to share her views as the voice of the taxpayer. Under current law, the National Taxpayer Advocate is not authorized to submit an *amicus* brief in a federal tax case.
- *Solution:* Authorize the National Taxpayer Advocate to appear as *amicus curiae* in federal tax cases and submit *amicus* briefs on issues pertaining to the protection of taxpayer rights.<sup>1</sup>

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7803(c)(2)(A) requires the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate to assist taxpayers in resolving problems with the IRS, to identify areas in which taxpayers experience problems in their dealings with the IRS, and to make administrative and legislative recommendations to mitigate such problems. IRC § 7803(c)(2)(B)(ii)(XI) directs the National Taxpayer Advocate in her annual reports to Congress to “identify the 10 most litigated issues for each category of taxpayers, including recommendations for mitigating such disputes.”

Under 28 U.S.C. § 516, only officers of the Department of Justice may represent the United States in litigation, except as otherwise authorized by law. Under 5 U.S.C. § 3106, the head of an executive department may not employ an attorney or counsel for the conduct of litigation in which the United States is a party, except as otherwise authorized by law. IRC § 7452 specifies that the Secretary of the Treasury “shall be represented by the Chief Counsel for the Internal Revenue Service or his delegate” in litigation before the U.S. Tax Court.

Under 5 U.S.C. § 612(b), the Small Business Administration (SBA) Chief Counsel for Advocacy is authorized to appear as *amicus curiae* in certain circumstances to represent the interests of small businesses. By contrast, the National Taxpayer Advocate, who is often referred to as “the voice of the taxpayer” both within the IRS and before Congress, is not authorized to appear as *amicus curiae* in federal tax litigation.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

While trial lawyers advocate on behalf of clients to win individual cases, precedential issues that could affect many or all taxpayers sometimes come before the courts with no one representing the interests of taxpayers as a group or advocating to protect fundamental taxpayer rights.

For example, in *Facebook, Inc. v. IRS*, a U.S. district court considered Facebook’s position that it was legally entitled to a hearing before the IRS Independent Office of Appeals.<sup>2</sup> For support, *Facebook* cited the provision of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TBOR) that describes “the right to appeal a decision of the Internal Revenue Service in an independent forum.”<sup>3</sup> The court rejected Facebook’s position, broadly holding that TBOR “did not grant [taxpayers] new enforceable rights.” The court’s decision may well be correct, but in the rare cases

1 See Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TBOR), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/taxpayer-rights> (last visited Sept. 18, 2024). The rights contained in TBOR are also codified in IRC § 7803(a)(3).

2 *Facebook, Inc. v. IRS*, 121 A.F.T.R.2d 2018-1752 (N.D. Cal. 2018).

3 IRC § 7803(a)(3)(E).

where a court's decision has the potential to affect the fundamental taxpayer rights of all or a large group of taxpayers, the court would benefit from hearing the position of the National Taxpayer Advocate as the voice of the taxpayer.

Just as the SBA Chief Counsel for Advocacy may submit *amicus* briefs to help ensure federal courts are informed about the impact of regulations on small businesses, the National Taxpayer Advocate could more effectively protect taxpayer rights if she were granted comparable authority to submit *amicus* briefs in cases that affect taxpayer rights. It is anticipated this authority would be used sparingly, as is the practice of the SBA Chief Counsel for Advocacy.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC §§ 7803 and 7452 to authorize the National Taxpayer Advocate to appear as *amicus curiae* in federal tax litigation and submit *amicus* briefs on matters relating to the protection of taxpayer rights.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For more detail, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2016 Annual Report to Congress 37 (Special Focus: *Provide the National Taxpayer Advocate the Authority to Hire Independent Counsel, Comment on Regulations, and File Amicus Briefs in Litigation Raising Taxpayer Rights Issues*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC16\\_Volume1\\_SpecialFocus.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC16_Volume1_SpecialFocus.pdf). See also IRS Program Manager Technical Advice 2007-00566 (Oct. 2, 2002), [https://www.irs.gov/pub/iraoa/pmta00566\\_7189.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/iraoa/pmta00566_7189.pdf).

**Legislative Recommendation #41****Authorize the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate to Assist Certain Taxpayers Experiencing Economic Hardships During a Lapse in Appropriations****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* During government shutdowns, IRS lien and levy activities carried out by automation are permitted to continue, but IRS and TAS employees, including the National Taxpayer Advocate, generally are prohibited from assisting taxpayers experiencing economic hardships as a result of those collection activities.
- *Solution:* Clarify that TAS and IRS Collection employees may work during government shutdowns to the extent necessary to assist taxpayers experiencing economic hardships as a result of IRS collection actions.

**PRESENT LAW**

Article I of the Constitution provides that, “No Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law.”<sup>1</sup> The Antideficiency Act (ADA) is one of several statutes that implement this provision.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, 31 U.S.C. § 1341(a), among other things, prohibits any officer or employee of the U.S. government or the District of Columbia government from (i) making or authorizing an expenditure or obligation exceeding an amount available in an appropriation or fund for the expenditure or obligation or (ii) involving his or her respective government employer in a contract or obligation for the payment of money before an appropriation is made, unless authorized by law. The ADA contains an additional prohibition against the acceptance of voluntary services, “except for emergencies involving the safety of human life or the protection of property.”<sup>3</sup>

IRC § 6343(a)(1)(D) requires the Secretary to release a levy and promptly notify the affected person if the Secretary determines the levy “is creating an economic hardship due to the financial condition of the taxpayer.”

IRC § 7803(c)(2)(A)(i) directs the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate (commonly referred to as the Taxpayer Advocate Service, or TAS) to “assist taxpayers in resolving problems with the Internal Revenue Service.” IRC § 7811 authorizes the National Taxpayer Advocate to issue a Taxpayer Assistance Order (TAO) where a “taxpayer is suffering or about to suffer a significant hardship as a result of the manner in which the internal revenue laws are being administered by the Secretary.” A significant hardship includes “an immediate threat of adverse action” and “irreparable injury to, or a long-term adverse impact on, the taxpayer if relief is not granted.” A TAO may require the Secretary “within a specified time period ... to release property of the taxpayer levied upon.”

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. CONST. art. I, § 9, cl. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Pub. L. No. 97-258, 96 Stat. 877, 923 (1982).

<sup>3</sup> 31 U.S.C. § 1342.

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

Lien and levy activities carried out by automation, which do not require the expenditure of additional appropriations, are permitted to continue during government shutdowns resulting from a lapse in appropriations. During both the 2018-2019 and 2013 shutdowns, the IRS issued thousands of notices of levy on Social Security and other government benefits as well as levies on wages and financial accounts of individuals and businesses, because these notices were preprogrammed into the IRS's computer systems before the shutdowns began.

Thousands of additional taxpayers were affected by collection actions taken in the weeks preceding the shutdowns. For example, a bank generally has up to 21 days to remit levied account proceeds to the IRS. Therefore, levies issued in the 21 days preceding a government shutdown may affect taxpayers after the shutdown begins.

Despite IRC provisions that protect and relieve taxpayers who are experiencing economic hardship from levies, the IRS Lapsed Appropriations Contingency Plans generally have not permitted IRS or TAS employees, including the National Taxpayer Advocate, to work economic hardship cases during government shutdowns to assist these taxpayers.<sup>4</sup> In addition, some taxpayers who requested the assistance of the National Taxpayer Advocate and TAS prior to the shutdown experienced significant hardships and irreparable injuries because TAS could not work on their cases during the shutdown.<sup>5</sup>

In its Lapsed Appropriations Contingency Plans,<sup>6</sup> the IRS, with concurrence from the Treasury Department and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), takes the position that the ADA's exception for "protection of property" applies solely to *government* property – not *taxpayer* property.<sup>7</sup> As a result, it has concluded that TAS's activities to assist taxpayers in releasing IRS levies that create an economic hardship due to the financial condition of the taxpayer do not fit within the exception. We question that interpretation. First, the statute itself simply says "property." The distinction between "property" and "government property" is obvious, and if Congress intended to limit the scope of the exception to "government property," it presumably would have written the statute to specify "government property." Second, interpreting "property" to include only "government property" undermines Congress's more recent statutory enactment of IRC § 6343(a)(1)(D), which is intended to protect taxpayers from levies that cause economic hardships.

Even accepting the IRS's position that the ADA's exception for the "protection of property" is limited to the protection of *government* property, a threshold determination must be made about whether levied funds are, in fact, government property. IRC § 6343(a)(1)(D) requires the Secretary to release a levy if it is "determined that such levy is creating an economic hardship due to the financial condition of the taxpayer." In blunt terms,

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- 4 See IRS, Servicewide Electronic Research Program Alert 19A0017, Release of Levy and Release of Lien (2019) ("While there is a lapse in funding during the partial shutdown we are not authorized to take this action. We may do so once we are fully opened, so please call us back at that time. Please apologize to the taxpayer and explain we are not authorized to release the levy or lien due to the partial government shutdown. Explain that they may call us back after we are fully reopened.").
  - 5 For additional discussion of how TAS's statutory authority to assist taxpayers suffering or about to suffer significant hardships was undermined during a shutdown, see National Taxpayer Advocate Fiscal Year 2015 Objectives Report to Congress 79 (Area of Focus: *The IRS's Decision Not to Except Any TAS Employees During the Government Shutdown Resulted in Violations of Taxpayer Rights and Undermined TAS's Statutory Authority to Assist Taxpayers Suffering or About to Suffer Significant Hardship*), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/The-IRSs-Decision-Not-to-Except-Any-TAS-Employees-During-the-Government-Shutdown.pdf>, and National Taxpayer Advocate Fiscal Year 2020 Objectives Report to Congress 40 (*Impact of the 35-Day Partial Government Shutdown on the Taxpayer Advocate Service*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/JRC20\\_Volume1\\_GovShutdown.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/JRC20_Volume1_GovShutdown.pdf).
  - 6 See, e.g., IRS, Fiscal Year 2024 Lapsed Appropriations Contingency Plan (Mar. 15, 2024), <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/266/IRS-FY24LapsePlan.pdf>.
  - 7 See Government Accountability Office, GAO-060382SP, *Principles of Federal Appropriations Law*, vol. II at 6-111 (3d ed. 2006) (citing 9 Comp. Dec. 182, 185 (1902)), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/2019-11/202819.pdf>.

Congress has made a determination that the IRS should not take property if doing so would put the taxpayer and the taxpayer's family out on the street.

TAS plays a central role in helping the Secretary determine whether a levy would create an economic hardship and therefore whether property can be levied upon (meaning that it would become government property). Thus, if the IRS seeks to protect "government property" via a levy, it must give affected taxpayers an opportunity to show that the levy will cause an economic hardship and therefore should be released (meaning it is not government property).<sup>8</sup>

From a policy perspective, the current interpretation produces results that greatly undermine taxpayer rights, including the *right to a fair and just tax system*.<sup>9</sup> The asymmetry of allowing the IRS to take collection action against a taxpayer while not allowing TAS to work with the taxpayer and the IRS to determine whether the collection action is creating an economic hardship (*e.g.*, imminent eviction) that requires a levy release under law shocks the conscience. To eliminate the abrogation of the taxpayer protections codified in IRC § 6343(a)(1)(D), the National Taxpayer Advocate believes the IRS should either work with the Treasury Department and OMB to adopt an ADA interpretation allowing TAS and Collection employees to release ongoing levies that create economic hardships or suspend all existing levies and refrain from imposing new levies during a government shutdown. The current asymmetrical approach produces an absurd "heads the IRS wins, tails the taxpayer loses" result.

While we will continue to advocate within the agency to protect taxpayers during government shutdowns, our experience to date suggests the existing legal interpretation is unlikely to change. For that reason, we recommend Congress clarify the law to ensure that government shutdowns resulting from a lapse in appropriations do not subject taxpayers to serious economic hardships, which in some cases may include eviction, utility shutoffs, or the inability to pay for medical treatment.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Clarify that during a lapse in appropriations (i) the National Taxpayer Advocate may incur obligations in advance of appropriations for purposes of assisting taxpayers experiencing an economic hardship within the meaning of IRC § 6343(a)(1)(D) due to an IRS action or inaction and (ii) the IRS may incur obligations in advance of appropriations for purposes of complying with any TAO issued pursuant to IRC § 7811.

<sup>8</sup> The Justice Department has issued a legal opinion concluding that certain government functions not specifically authorized to continue during a lapse in appropriations must nonetheless continue where the lawful continuation of these functions is "necessarily incident" to other activities for which there is statutory authority to continue. See Authority for the Continuance of Government Functions During a Temporary Lapse in Appropriations, 5 Op. O.L.C. 1 (1981), [www.justice.gov/file/22536/download](https://www.justice.gov/file/22536/download).

<sup>9</sup> See IRC § 7803(a)(3)(J). See also Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TBOR), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/get-help/taxpayer-rights> (last visited Sept. 25, 2024). The rights contained in the TBOR are also codified in IRC § 7803(a)(3).

**Legislative Recommendation #42****Repeal Statute Suspension Under IRC § 7811(d) for Taxpayers Seeking Assistance From the Taxpayer Advocate Service****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* When a taxpayer requests assistance from TAS in writing, IRC § 7811(d) provides that the period of limitations within which the IRS may assess or collect tax is extended. The provision is intended to protect the IRS's interests, but the IRS has not implemented it since its enactment in 1988. In addition, the provision does not apply when a taxpayer requests assistance from TAS by phone, so if implemented, taxpayers who request TAS assistance in writing and taxpayers who request TAS assistance by phone would be treated differently.
- *Solution:* Repeal IRC § 7811(d).

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7811(d) suspends the statutory period of limitations for any action for which a taxpayer seeks assistance from TAS. The period is only suspended if the taxpayer submits a written application for relief.<sup>1</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Despite the fact that Congress enacted this provision in 1988,<sup>2</sup> the IRS has never implemented it. The intent of the provision was to protect the interests of the government, but the IRS has not seen a need to make use of it. Moreover, implementation of the rule would require significant technology upgrades and procedural changes that the IRS has chosen not to undertake.

In concept, IRC § 7811(d) aims to ensure the IRS will not lose the ability to assess or collect tax if the applicable statutory deadlines pass while a taxpayer's case is pending with TAS. Suspension of the assessment or collection period would give the IRS more time to take enforcement actions. However, statute suspensions are unnecessary to protect the government's interests. The IRS currently may take enforcement actions against taxpayers with open TAS cases, if necessary, to protect the government's interests.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, if the IRS ever were to implement IRC § 7811(d), it would cause similarly situated taxpayers to be treated differently. By its terms, the provision only applies when a taxpayer submits a written request for TAS assistance. It does not apply when a taxpayer requests TAS assistance by phone, which is the method by which most taxpayers seek TAS's help. Thus, this provision – apart from being unnecessary and unutilized – would produce disparate outcomes for taxpayers who, despite lacking any knowledge of this issue, contact TAS by different means.

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<sup>1</sup> Treas. Reg. § 301.7811-1(e)(4).

<sup>2</sup> Technical and Miscellaneous Revenue Act of 1988, Pub. L. No. 100-647, § 6230, 102 Stat. 3342, 3734 (1988).

<sup>3</sup> Even if TAS issues a Taxpayer Advocate Order (TAO) directing the IRS to suspend collection, TAS will generally agree to modify the TAO if collection is in jeopardy. If TAS ever did not agree to do so, the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner could modify or rescind the TAO. See IRC § 7811(c)(1).

Lastly, despite the IRS's decision not to implement the provision, it has been raised in litigation, creating uncertainty for taxpayers and the IRS alike.<sup>4</sup> Given that IRC § 7811(d) has not been used since it was enacted more than 35 years ago, it serves no useful purpose, and its repeal would prevent future litigation in which the provision is cited, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommends it be repealed.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Repeal IRC § 7811(d).<sup>5</sup>

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4 In *Rothkamm v. United States*, 802 F.3d 699 (5th Cir. 2015), *rev'g* 2014 WL 4986884 (M.D. La. Sept. 15, 2014), the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit held, in relevant part, that IRC § 7811(d) tolled the period for filing a wrongful levy claim, which by operation of IRC § 6532(c)(2) extended the period for filing suit. IRS Action on Decision 2020-03, 2020-17 I.R.B. 663 explains that except for cases appealable to the Fifth Circuit, the IRS will not follow the holding in *Rothkamm* that IRC § 7811(d) suspends the running of the limitations periods for third parties to file wrongful levy claims or suits, and outside the Fifth Circuit, the government will continue to defend its interpretation.

5 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see John Lewis Taxpayer Protection Act, H.R. 3738, 117th Cong. § 202 (2021); Taxpayer Protection Act, H.R. 2171, 115th Cong. § 202 (2017); Taxpayer Protection Act, H.R. 4912, 114th Cong. § 202 (2016). For more detail, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2015 Annual Report to Congress 316 (Legislative Recommendation: *Repeal or Fix Statute Suspension Under IRC § 7811(d)*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC15\\_Volume1\\_LR\\_01\\_Statute-Limitations.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC15_Volume1_LR_01_Statute-Limitations.pdf).

## STRENGTHEN TAXPAYER RIGHTS IN JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS

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### Legislative Recommendation #43

## Expand the U.S. Tax Court's Jurisdiction to Hear Refund Cases

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* For most taxpayers, the U.S. Tax Court is the optimal court in which to challenge an adverse IRS decision because payment is not a requirement for jurisdiction, the judges possess specialized tax expertise, and taxpayers can represent themselves more easily than in other federal courts. However, taxpayers generally may litigate their tax liabilities in Tax Court only when the IRS determines a taxpayer owes more tax and issues a notice of deficiency. Taxpayers who are solely seeking refunds because they believe they overpaid their tax are barred from the Tax Court and must litigate their claims in other less user-friendly and more costly federal courts.
- *Solution:* Expand the Tax Court's jurisdiction to determine tax liabilities and refunds in refund cases.

### PRESENT LAW

IRC § 7442 defines the jurisdiction of the U.S. Tax Court. IRC § 6212 requires the IRS to issue a notice of deficiency before assessing certain liabilities. When the IRS issues a notice of deficiency, IRC § 6213(a) authorizes the taxpayer to petition the U.S. Tax Court within 90 days (or 150 days if the notice is addressed to a person outside the United States) to review the IRS determination.

If a taxpayer does not receive a notice of deficiency and seeks judicial review of an adverse IRS determination, the taxpayer must pay the tax, penalty, or interest and file suit in a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. This situation generally arises when the taxpayer is claiming a refund of tax, penalty, or interest that has been paid. Taxpayers solely seeking refunds of monies already paid cannot litigate their cases in the Tax Court.

### REASONS FOR CHANGE

Due to the tax expertise of its judges, the Tax Court is often better equipped to consider tax controversies than other courts. It is also more accessible to less knowledgeable and unrepresented taxpayers than other courts because it offers simplified and less formal procedures, particularly for disputes that do not exceed \$50,000. Another benefit is that low-income taxpayers representing themselves are generally offered the option of receiving free legal assistance from a Low Income Taxpayer Clinic or *pro bono* representative. In most instances, the Tax Court is the least expensive and best forum for low-income taxpayers to have their day in court.

Under current law, taxpayers who receive a notice of deficiency and wish to challenge the IRS's proposed adjustment can file a petition in the Tax Court, while taxpayers who have paid their tax and are seeking a refund must sue for a refund in a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims to obtain a judicial determination.

*Example:* A taxpayer files a return that reflects a tax liability of \$15,000. The taxpayer had \$12,000 of withholding and pays an additional \$3,000 with the return. Shortly after filing the original return, the taxpayer's preparer discovers an error, and the taxpayer files an amended return showing a tax liability of \$11,000 and claiming a refund of \$4,000. The IRS denies the claim. Under current law, the taxpayer cannot go to Tax Court because there is no deficiency (*i.e.*, the IRS has not determined that any additional tax is due). To pursue the \$4,000 refund claim, the taxpayer will have to file a refund suit in a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. This law harms taxpayers because a refund suit is a more formal court proceeding that involves greater cost and generally requires representation by an attorney.

The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends that all taxpayers bringing refund suits be given the option to litigate their tax disputes in the Tax Court. By expanding the Tax Court's jurisdiction, Congress can give all taxpayers a better opportunity to obtain judicial review of adverse IRS liability determinations.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC §§ 7442 and 7422 to give the Tax Court jurisdiction to determine liabilities in refund suits to the same extent as the U.S. district courts and the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a related recommendation that would allow taxpayers to challenge assessable penalties in the Tax Court, see *Provide That Assessable Penalties Are Subject to Deficiency Procedures*, *supra*. Based on existing law and procedures, the IRS Office of Chief Counsel represents the government in Tax Court cases, and the Justice Department's Tax Division represents the government in U.S. district court and the U.S. Court of Federal Claims cases. If the Tax Court's jurisdiction is expanded and some cases shift toward the Tax Court, the number of attorneys representing the government in each agency may require adjustment.

**Legislative Recommendation #44****Authorize the U.S. Tax Court to Order Refunds or Credits in Collection Due Process Proceedings Where Liability Is at Issue****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* In most Tax Court cases, the court has the authority to determine that a taxpayer made an overpayment of tax and order the IRS to provide a refund or credit. Where the Tax Court considers the IRS's determination of liability in a Collection Due Process (CDP) hearing, however, the Tax Court does not have the authority to order a refund or credit – even where the taxpayer did not have a prior opportunity to challenge the liability. This restriction on the Tax Court's authority imposes financial costs and time burdens on taxpayers who must sue for a refund or credit in other federal courts. It also creates judicial inefficiencies by requiring the filing of multiple causes of action.
- *Solution:* Allow the Tax Court to order a refund or credit in all cases in which it is authorized to determine a taxpayer's tax liability.

**PRESENT LAW**

In deficiency cases, IRC § 6512(b) grants the Tax Court jurisdiction to determine that a taxpayer made an overpayment of income tax for the period at issue and that such amount must be refunded or credited to the taxpayer.<sup>1</sup> IRC § 6511(a) generally requires a taxpayer to file a claim for credit or refund by the later of three years from the time a return was filed or, if no return was filed, two years from the time the tax was paid.

In CDP proceedings, IRC § 6330 allows a taxpayer to challenge their underlying liability if the taxpayer “did not receive any statutory notice of deficiency for such tax liability or did not otherwise have an opportunity to dispute such tax liability.”<sup>2</sup> However, several courts have concluded that the Tax Court in CDP cases, unlike in deficiency cases, does not have jurisdiction to determine the extent to which a taxpayer has made an overpayment and is entitled to a refund or credit.<sup>3</sup>

The reasoning for this conclusion is that IRC § 6330(d)(1) “gives the Tax Court jurisdiction ‘with respect to such matter’ as is covered by the final determination in a requested hearing before the Appeals Office.”<sup>4</sup> The Appeals determination is required to address (1) “the verification ... that the requirements of any applicable law or administrative procedure have been met,”<sup>5</sup> (2) any relevant issues raised by the taxpayer “relating to the unpaid tax or the proposed levy,” including “the existence or amount of the underlying tax liability,” if the taxpayer “did not receive any statutory notice of deficiency for such tax liability or did not otherwise have an opportunity to dispute such tax liability,”<sup>6</sup> and (3) whether the proposed collection action “balances the need for efficient collection of taxes with the legitimate concerns of [the taxpayer] that any collection action be no more intrusive than necessary.”<sup>7</sup> Based on these considerations, the Appeals Officer is supposed to make a determination “regarding the legitimacy of the proposed levy [or filing of notice of federal tax lien] and, if

1 IRC § 6401 provides that the term “overpayment” includes “that part of the amount of the payment of any internal revenue tax which is assessed or collected after the expiration of the period of limitation properly applicable thereto.” The Supreme Court has stated that an overpayment occurs “when a taxpayer pays more than is owed, for whatever reason or no reason at all.” *United States v. Dalm*, 494 U.S. 596, 609 n.6 (1990). See also *Jones v. Liberty Glass Co.*, 332 U.S. 524, 531 (1947).

2 IRC § 6330(c)(2)(B).

3 See *Greene-Thapedi v. Comm’r*, 126 T.C. 1 (2006); *Willson v. Comm’r*, 805 F.3d 316 (D.C. Cir. 2015); *McLane v. Comm’r*, T.C. Memo. 2018-149, *aff’d*, 24 F.4th 316 (4th Cir. 2022); *Brown v. Comm’r*, 58 F.4th 1064 (9th Cir. 2023), *aff’g* T.C. Memo. 2021-112.

4 *Greene-Thapedi v. Comm’r*, 126 T.C. 1, at 6 (2006).

5 IRC § 6330(c)(1), (c)(3)(A).

6 IRC § 6330(c)(2), (c)(3)(B).

7 IRC § 6330(c)(3)(C).

relevant, the amount and/or existence of the unpaid tax liability.”<sup>8</sup> Because the existence or nonexistence of an overpayment is not pertinent to this determination by the Office of Appeals, the courts have reasoned the Tax Court lacks jurisdiction to review the issue.

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

The limitation on the Tax Court’s jurisdiction to determine an overpayment and order a refund in CDP cases prevents taxpayers from obtaining resolution of their tax disputes in a single forum and imposes unnecessary financial and administrative burdens on taxpayers and the court system.

The Tax Court, unlike other federal courts, is a prepayment forum that ordinarily allows taxpayers to dispute their liabilities without first having to pay them in full. In CDP proceedings, only taxpayers who did not otherwise have an opportunity to dispute their underlying liabilities are permitted to contest them.

Taxpayers who are allowed to challenge the existence of a liability in CDP proceedings can do so because they did not receive a notice of deficiency or otherwise have a previous opportunity to dispute the liability. When taxpayers do not receive a notice of deficiency, it generally means that either they were issued a notice of deficiency but did not actually receive it or a type of tax was assessed against them that is not subject to deficiency procedures. A prior opportunity to dispute the liability means a prior opportunity for a conference with Appeals offered either before or after the assessment of the tax.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, if a taxpayer is allowed to challenge the liability in CDP, it means that the taxpayer has not had a prior opportunity to go to court or to Appeals.

Under these circumstances, the inability of the Tax Court to order a refund or credit seems not only unfair but inefficient. For a taxpayer in a CDP proceeding to receive a refund, the taxpayer must fully pay the assessed tax for the taxable year(s) at issue, file a timely administrative refund claim with the IRS under IRC § 6511 and, if the claim is denied, timely file a refund suit in a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. It would be much more efficient to allow the taxpayer to claim the refund in the CDP case and to allow the court that is already familiar with the facts of the case to determine whether an overpayment exists.

CDP taxpayers who may challenge the existence or amount of an underlying tax liability pursuant to IRC § 6330(c)(2)(B) should, similar to taxpayers in deficiency proceedings, have the opportunity to obtain a refund in a prepayment forum, rather than be required to full-pay the asserted liability and then incur additional time and expense to dispute the liability in another forum.<sup>10</sup> Amending IRC § 6330 to explicitly grant the Tax Court the authority to determine overpayments and order refunds in CDP cases will protect taxpayers’ *right to finality*, reduce taxpayer burden, and better ensure the IRS collects the correct amount of tax. The Tax Court could apply to CDP proceedings its long-established procedures for determining an overpayment in deficiency cases, so new procedures would not be required.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6330(d)(1) to grant the Tax Court jurisdiction to determine overpayments for the tax periods at issue and to order refunds or credits in a CDP case, subject to the limitations of IRC §§ 6511(a) and 6512(b)(3), if the court determines that the taxpayer’s underlying tax liability for a taxable year is less than the amounts paid or credited for that year.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Willson v. Comm’r*, 805 F.3d at 316.

<sup>9</sup> Treas. Reg. § 301.6330-1(e)(3), Q&A E2.

<sup>10</sup> See also Carlton M. Smith, *Give the Tax Court Full Refund Jurisdiction*, PROCEDUREALLY TAXING (June 7, 2024), <https://www.taxnotes.com/procedureally-taxing/give-tax-court-full-refund-jurisdiction/2024/06/07/7k9bg>.

<sup>11</sup> Under this proposal, refund claims in CDP cases would continue to be subject to the limitations of IRC §§ 6511(a) and 6512(b)(3). If the claim was filed by the taxpayer within three years from the time a return was filed, the refund would be limited to the amount paid in the three-year period (plus extensions) before the notice of deficiency was mailed and the amount paid after the notice of deficiency was mailed.

**Legislative Recommendation #45****Promote Consistency With the Supreme Court's *Boechler* Decision by Making the Time Limits for Bringing All Tax Litigation Subject to Equitable Judicial Doctrines****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The U.S. Supreme Court has held that the Tax Court may toll the 30-day deadline for filing a petition in a Collection Due Process (CDP) case when it is equitable to do so (*e.g.*, when a taxpayer misses a filing deadline because he has had a heart attack and is temporarily incapacitated). However, the tax code contains other filing deadlines, including deadlines in deficiency cases and deadlines in refund cases, and it is not clear whether courts have the authority to toll those deadlines on equitable grounds.
- *Solution:* Clarify that federal courts may toll filing deadlines in tax cases when it is equitable to do so.

**PRESENT LAW**

Various provisions of the tax code authorize proceedings or suits against the government, provided such actions are brought timely. If a time limit for bringing suit is deemed a jurisdictional requirement, it cannot be waived. IRC § 7442, which relates to the jurisdiction of the Tax Court, does not specify that prescribed periods for petitioning the Tax Court are jurisdictional.<sup>1</sup> IRC § 7451(b) provides a *statutory* tolling rule for the filing of petitions in any case in which a filing location is inaccessible or otherwise unavailable to the general public on the date a petition is due, but it does not address whether the period for filing a petition is subject to *equitable* tolling by the courts.

Equitable doctrines that, if available, might excuse an untimely filing include (1) equitable tolling (applicable when it is unfair to hold a plaintiff/petitioner to a statutory deadline because of facts and circumstances that unduly impeded the plaintiff's/petitioner's compliance); (2) forfeiture (applicable when the parties have acted as if the case need not operate under the statutory deadlines); and (3) waiver (applicable when the parties have agreed explicitly that a case need not operate under legal deadlines).

In the *Boechler* case, the Supreme Court held that the 30-day time limit in IRC § 6330(d)(1) to file a petition with the Tax Court for review of a CDP determination is not a jurisdictional requirement.<sup>2</sup> The Court noted that time limits that are not jurisdictional are presumptively subject to equitable tolling and explained that “we treat a procedural requirement as jurisdictional only if Congress ‘clearly states’ that it is.”<sup>3</sup> After parsing the language of IRC § 6330(d)(1), the Court found no such clear statement. The Court further held that the 30-day period in IRC § 6330(d)(1) is subject to equitable tolling.<sup>4</sup>

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1 IRC § 7442 provides in its entirety:

The Tax Court and its divisions shall have such jurisdiction as is conferred on them by this title, by chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1939, by title II and title III of the Revenue Act of 1926 (44 Stat. 10-87), or by laws enacted subsequent to February 26, 1926.

2 *Boechler, P.C. v. Comm’r*, 596 U.S. 199 (2022), *rev’g and remanding* 967 F.3d 760 (8th Cir. 2020).

3 *Id.* at 203.

4 *Id.* at 208-211.

Taxpayers generally bring their actions in the U.S. Tax Court, a U.S. district court, or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.<sup>5</sup>

## U.S. Tax Court

CDP cases like the one in the *Boechler* case are not the only type of controversy in which taxpayers, by filing a petition in the Tax Court within a specified period, may litigate their tax liabilities without first paying the tax. Other examples include deficiency proceedings and “stand-alone” innocent spouse cases (*i.e.*, where a taxpayer seeks innocent spouse relief in situations other than in response to a notice of deficiency or as part of a CDP proceeding).

IRC § 6213(a) provides that “[w]ithin 90 days ... the taxpayer may file a petition with the Tax Court for a redetermination of the deficiency.” The Supreme Court in *Boechler* acknowledged that lower courts have interpreted the IRC § 6213(a) deadline as jurisdictional and therefore not subject to equitable tolling but noted that “almost all [such lower court cases] predate this Court’s effort to ‘bring some discipline’ to the use of the term ‘jurisdictional.’”<sup>6</sup> After the Supreme Court decided the *Boechler* case, the Tax Court held that equitable tolling does not apply to deficiency cases.<sup>7</sup> In a separate case, however, the Third Circuit disagreed and held that the IRC § 6213(a) deadline is not jurisdictional and is subject to equitable tolling.<sup>8</sup>

As for tax code provisions imposing time limits for petitioning the Tax Court to determine the appropriate innocent spouse relief in stand-alone cases, the Supreme Court in *Boechler* noted that IRC § 6015(e)(1)(A) “much more clearly link[s] [its] jurisdictional grant[s] to a filing deadline,” but the Court did not decide whether the time limit is jurisdictional.<sup>9</sup> Prior to *Boechler*, three appellate courts agreed with the Tax Court and held that the time limit for requesting stand-alone innocent spouse relief is jurisdictional.<sup>10</sup>

## Other Federal Courts

Taxpayers seeking refunds may obtain judicial review in federal courts other than the Tax Court if they sue within a specified period. A refund suit can generally be brought in a U.S. district court or in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims within two years from the date the IRS denies a claim.<sup>11</sup> There is a split among the circuits regarding whether the statutory period for bringing a suit for refund is subject to equitable doctrines.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, parties other than the taxpayers with an interest in or lien on levied property may sue in a U.S. district court to enjoin enforcement of a wrongful levy or sale or to recover property (or proceeds from the sale

5 Some tax claims may also be heard by U.S. bankruptcy courts. The Supreme Court has held that the three-year lookback period that may qualify a tax liability for discharge in bankruptcy is subject to equitable tolling. *Young v. United States*, 535 U.S. 43, 47 (2002).

6 *Boechler*, 596 U.S. at 208.

7 *Hallmark Res. Collective v. Comm’r*, 159 T.C. 126 (2022).

8 *Culp v. Comm’r*, 75 F.4th 196 (3d Cir. 2023).

9 IRC § 6015(e)(1)(A) provides, in relevant part, that “[t]he individual may petition the Tax Court (and the Tax Court shall have jurisdiction) to determine the appropriate relief available to the individual under this section if such petition is filed during the 90-day period.” The Court also noted that IRC § 6404(g)(1), which confers Tax Court “jurisdiction over any action . . . to determine whether the Secretary’s failure to abate interest under this section was an abuse of discretion, . . . if such action is brought within 180 days,” more clearly links the jurisdictional grant to a filing deadline. *Boechler*, 596 U.S. at 206.

10 *Naufflett v. Comm’r*, 892 F.3d 649, 652–654 (4th Cir. 2018); *Matuszak v. Comm’r*, 862 F.3d 192, 196–198 (2d Cir. 2017); *Rubel v. Comm’r*, 856 F.3d 301, 306 (3d Cir. 2017).

11 IRC § 6532(a)(1).

12 *Compare RHI Holdings, Inc. v. United States*, 142 F.3d 1459, 1460–1463 (Fed. Cir. 1998) (declining to apply equitable principles to IRC § 6532), and *Becton Dickinson & Co. v. Wolckenhauer*, 215 F.3d 340 (3d Cir. 2000) (finding time limits set forth in IRC § 6532 are jurisdictional and not subject to equitable tolling), with *Volpicelli v. United States*, 777 F.3d 1042 (9th Cir. 2015) (concluding the time limits set forth in IRC § 6532 are not jurisdictional and are subject to equitable tolling), and *Howard Bank v. United States*, 759 F. Supp. 1073, 1080 (D. Vt. 1991), *aff’d*, 948 F.2d 1275 (2d Cir. 1991) (applying equitable principles to IRC § 6532 and estopping the IRS from raising the limitations period as a bar to suit).

of property) if they do so within a specified period (generally, within two years of levy).<sup>13</sup> Several federal courts have held that this period is not subject to equitable tolling,<sup>14</sup> but other appellate courts have held it is.<sup>15</sup>

Taxpayers may also bring suit, if they do so within the specified periods, to seek civil damages in a U.S. district court or bankruptcy court regarding unauthorized actions by the IRS.<sup>16</sup> Courts have differed on whether equitable doctrines can toll the period for bringing suit.<sup>17</sup>

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

The *Boechler* decision clarified that the filing deadline in CDP cases is not jurisdictional, and that the deadline is subject to equitable tolling. However, it did not address whether filing deadlines in other tax cases are jurisdictional or subject to equitable tolling. There is inconsistency in lower courts' interpretations of the various statutes that contain filing deadlines in tax cases.

The consequence for failing to commence suit in the Tax Court or another federal court within the time limits prescribed by the tax code is severe – taxpayers forfeit their day in Tax Court or other federal courts with jurisdiction to hear their claims.

Treating the tax code time limits for bringing suit as jurisdictional – which means that taxpayers who file suit even seconds late are barred from court regardless of the cause – can lead to harsh and unfair results. For example, the IRS itself occasionally provides inaccurate information to taxpayers regarding the filing deadline, and even in that circumstance, the court has declined to hear the taxpayer's case.<sup>18</sup> Other extenuating circumstances may include a medical emergency (*e.g.*, a heart attack or other medical condition that requires a taxpayer to be hospitalized). Moreover, most U.S. Tax Court petitioners do not have representation,<sup>19</sup> and unrepresented taxpayers are less likely to recognize the severe consequences of filing a late petition.

Consistent with taxpayers' *right to a fair and just tax system*,<sup>20</sup> equitable doctrines should be available to excuse a late filing in extenuating circumstances. Taxpayers would still be required to demonstrate that an equitable doctrine applies, and courts could apply the doctrines narrowly. However, the National Taxpayer Advocate believes courts should have the flexibility to make those determinations.

13 IRC § 6532(c).

14 See *Becton Dickinson and Co. v. Wolckenhauer*, 215 F.3d 340, 351-354 (3d Cir. 2000), and cases cited therein from four other circuits (holding that the IRC § 6532(c) period is jurisdictional and not subject to equitable tolling).

15 See, *e.g.*, *Volpicelli v. United States*, 777 F.3d 1042, 1047 (9th Cir. 2015) (holding that the IRC § 6532(c) period is subject to equitable tolling); *Supermail Cargo, Inc. v. United States*, 68 F.3d 1204 (9th Cir. 1995) (same).

16 IRC §§ 7431(d), 7432(d)(3), 7433(d)(3).

17 Compare *Aloe Vera of America, Inc. v. United States*, 580 F.3d 867, 871-872 (9th Cir. 2009) (holding that the time for bringing suit under IRC § 7431 is not subject to equitable tolling), and *Hynard v. IRS*, 233 F. Supp. 2d 502, 509 (S.D.N.Y. 2002) (holding that the time for bringing suit under IRC § 7433 is not subject to equitable tolling), with *Ramos v. United States*, 90 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 7176 (N.D. Cal. 2002) (denying motion to dismiss because doctrine of equitable tolling might apply to an IRC § 7433 action), and *Bennett v. United States*, 366 F. Supp. 2d 877, 879 (D. Neb. 2005) (holding that the application of equitable tolling to IRC §§ 7432 and 7433 actions has not been definitively determined, but it is an extraordinary remedy and did not apply in this case).

18 See, *e.g.*, *Naufflett*, 892 F.3d at 652-54 (doctrine of equitable tolling did not apply to innocent spouse case despite reliance on alleged erroneous IRS advice regarding the filing deadline); see also *Rubel v. Comm'r*, 856 F.3d 301, 306 (3d Cir. 2017).

19 In fiscal year 2023, 91 percent of taxpayers were unrepresented before the Tax Court. National Taxpayer Advocate 2023 Annual Report to Congress 158 (Most Litigated Issues), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ARC23\\_MostLitigatedIssues.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ARC23_MostLitigatedIssues.pdf).

20 See IRC § 7803(a)(3)(J) (identifying the "right to a fair and just tax system" as a taxpayer right); see also Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TBOR), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/taxpayer-rights> (last visited Oct. 18, 2024). The rights contained in TBOR are also codified in IRC § 7803(a)(3). The TBOR lists rights that already existed in the tax code, putting them in simple language and grouping them into ten fundamental rights. Employees are responsible for being familiar with and acting in accord with TBOR, including the *right to a fair and just tax system*.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enact a new section of the tax code to clarify that the time periods in the code within which taxpayers may petition the Tax Court or file suit in other federal courts are not jurisdictional and are subject to equitable judicial doctrines.<sup>21</sup>
- Specify that equitable tolling periods are included in timeliness determinations for purposes of enjoining any actions or proceedings or ordering any refunds or relief.<sup>22</sup>

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21 If this change to the tax code is enacted, a late-filed petition in the Tax Court would no longer be dismissed for lack of jurisdiction if the taxpayer is able to establish that equitable tolling should apply. That would mean that a dismissal of a petition from a notice of deficiency by the Tax Court due to untimeliness would be treated as a decision on the merits under IRC § 7459(d), and the doctrine of *res judicata* would prevent the taxpayer from pursuing a refund suit. We therefore recommend that IRC § 7459(d) be correspondingly amended to make clear that a dismissal based on untimeliness is not a decision on the merits.

22 For example, the last two sentences of IRC § 6213(a) provide that:

The Tax Court shall have no jurisdiction to enjoin any action or proceeding or order any refund under this subsection unless a timely petition for a redetermination of the deficiency has been filed and then only in respect of the deficiency that is the subject of such petition. Any petition filed with the Tax Court on or before the last date specified for filing such petition by the Secretary in the notice of deficiency shall be treated as timely filed.

To ensure consistency, equitable tolling must be applied to the underlying cause of action. Otherwise, a change in law consistent with our first recommendation could lead to the absurd result in which equitable tolling is interpreted as applying to the filing of a suit for refund, thus making the suit timely, but not applying to the underlying statutory period in which the IRS is authorized to issue a refund under IRC § 6514, thus barring the taxpayer from receiving a refund if the suit is successful. For discussion of a related issue, see *Extend the Deadline for Taxpayers to File a Refund Suit When They Request Appeals Reconsideration of a Notice of Claim Disallowance But the IRS Has Not Acted Timely Decided Their Claim*, *infra*.

**Legislative Recommendation #46****Extend the Deadline for Taxpayers to File a Refund Suit When They Request Appeals Reconsideration of a Notice of Claim Disallowance But the IRS Has Not Timely Decided Their Claim****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Taxpayers have two years to file a refund suit after the IRS mails a notice of claim disallowance denying a claim for credit or refund. Taxpayers may request reconsideration of a disallowance by the IRS's Independent Office of Appeals (Appeals), but the two-year period is not suspended during Appeals' consideration of the case unless both parties agree to an extension. If Appeals does not resolve the claim timely, the taxpayer may miss the deadline for filing a refund suit and thereby forfeit their refund while waiting for Appeals to act.
- *Solution:* Extend the two-year period for taxpayers to file a refund suit if they have timely requested Appeals' reconsideration of a notice of claim disallowance and Appeals has not made its decision within two years of the denial of the refund claim.

**PRESENT LAW**

If the IRS denies a taxpayer's claim for refund by issuing a notice of claim disallowance, the taxpayer may bring a suit for refund in a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.<sup>1</sup> IRC § 6532(a)(1) requires that a refund suit be initiated within two years from the date the IRS mailed the notice of claim disallowance. IRC § 6514(a)(2) prohibits the IRS from issuing a refund after the two-year period for filing a refund suit expires unless the taxpayer has brought a timely suit.

The taxpayer and the IRS may extend the period for bringing a refund suit if an extension is executed by both parties before the two-year period has expired.<sup>2</sup> While a taxpayer may request Appeals' reconsideration of a claim after the IRS has issued a notice of claim disallowance, IRC § 6532(a)(4) specifically provides that such reconsideration does not extend the period to bring a refund suit.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

The strict two-year limitation on bringing a refund suit and the requirement that any refund must be paid within that period poses hazards for tax professionals and taxpayers alike. They may assume that because they are actively pursuing resolution of their claim with Appeals, their rights to file suit and receive a refund are protected. However, reconsideration of a disallowed claim does not extend the period to file suit under IRC § 6532 or the period in which the IRS is permitted to issue a refund under IRC § 6514. Therefore, if Appeals fails to complete consideration of a claim within two years after the IRS mails a notice of claim disallowance,

1 A taxpayer may not bring a suit for refund in the U.S. Tax Court. The Tax Court is a prepayment forum for challenging federal tax disputes. Its judges possess specialized tax expertise, and it is often a less formal, less expensive, and more accessible forum for *pro se* and low-income taxpayers. For a related recommendation to allow taxpayers to bring refund suits in the U.S. Tax Court, see Legislative Recommendation: *Expand the U.S. Tax Court's Jurisdiction to Hear Refund Cases*, *supra*.

2 IRC § 6532(a)(2); Rev. Rul. 71-57, 1971-1 C.B. 405. *But see Kaffenberger v. United States*, 314 F.3d 944, 953 (8th Cir. 2003) (holding that the two-year period under IRC § 6532(a)(1) can be extended after the two-year period has expired); *nonacq. on this issue*, IRS Notice 2004-57, 2004-35 I.R.B. 350. IRS, Form 907, Agreement to Extend the Time to Bring Suit, is used to extend the period for bringing a refund suit. However, Form 907 must be countersigned by the IRS, and there is no designated method for taxpayers to submit the form to the IRS to be countersigned. See Erin M. Collins, Notice of Claim Disallowance: Don't Make This Mistake, NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE BLOG (Apr. 6, 2022), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog-notice-of-claim-disallowance-dont-make-this-mistake>.

the IRS is prohibited by IRC § 6514(a)(2) from issuing a refund, even if the IRS agrees that a refund is owed. IRC § 6514(a)(2) even prohibits the IRS from issuing a refund where Appeals has made a determination within the two-year period but the IRS did not issue the payment or allow the credit during that period.

Current law may inadvertently discourage taxpayers from seeking administrative resolution of disputed issues because of the risk that their refund claims could become time-barred while an appeal is pending. Conversely, it may encourage unnecessary litigation to protect the refund statute of limitations. It is in the interest of all parties to allow the administrative process to play out without jeopardizing taxpayers' ability to seek judicial review. By allowing the administrative appeal process to conclude, all parties may avoid the challenges and costs of a lawsuit, and the federal courts may avoid hearing a case the parties can resolve without judicial involvement.

Statutes of limitation are important to prevent open-ended claims. But where taxpayers are working with the IRS to reach an administrative resolution, the period of limitations should not jeopardize the taxpayers' ability to receive a refund or credit or to obtain judicial review of an adverse Appeals determination if the IRS does not act timely. This is particularly true where taxpayers timely pursue their appeal rights, but Appeals is simply behind on its case inventories or a case gets lost in transit between different IRS functions.

To prevent these inequities, we recommend IRC § 6532 be amended to remove paragraph (a)(4), which provides that any administrative reconsideration of a disallowed claim does not extend the period to file a refund suit. We further recommend that IRC § 6532 be amended to ensure that where taxpayers timely request Appeals' review of a disallowed claim, the period to file a refund suit will not expire for at least six months after the date Appeals makes a final determination with respect to the claim. This will allow sufficient time for taxpayers to decide whether to pursue judicial review if Appeals denies their claim and for the IRS to issue the refund or allow the credit if Appeals allows their claim.<sup>3</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6532(a) to remove subsection (a)(4) and to provide that where a taxpayer has submitted a written request for reconsideration of a disallowed claim by the IRS's Independent Office of Appeals within two years of the mailing of a notice of claim disallowance, the time to bring a suit for refund shall not expire before the later of (1) the standard two-year period provided in IRC § 6532(a)(1) or (2) six months after the date of the Appeals closing letter.<sup>4</sup>

3 IRC § 6514(a)(2) prohibits the issuance of a refund after the expiration of the period for filing a refund suit. By amending IRC § 6532(a) to extend the period to file suit, the period within which the IRS may pay a refund or issue a credit under IRC § 6514(a)(2) would similarly be extended.

4 Under current law, the IRS is not required to process a taxpayer's claim for credit or refund or even respond to the claim. Theoretically, the IRS can simply ignore a refund claim. For a legislative recommendation that would require the IRS to timely process claims for credit or refund, see Legislative Recommendation: *Require the IRS to Timely Process Claims for Credit or Refund*, *supra*.

**Legislative Recommendation #47****Authorize the Tax Court to Sign Subpoenas for the Production of Records Held by a Third Party Prior to a Scheduled Hearing****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The Tax Court’s pre-trial discovery powers are more limited than those of other federal courts. As a result, litigants often must attend pre-trial conferences solely to request or obtain books, records, and other key documents, and pre-trial discussions may be delayed or impeded, increasing the likelihood cases that otherwise would be settled must go to trial.
- *Solution:* Authorize the Tax Court to issue third-party subpoenas directing the production of documents prior to a scheduled hearing.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7456(a)(1) authorizes the Tax Court to issue subpoenas for the “production of all necessary returns, books, papers, documents, correspondence, and other evidence, from any place in the United States at any designated place of hearing ...” The Tax Court interprets IRC § 7456(a)(1) as permitting it to issue a subpoena to produce documents by a third party only at designated places of hearing, including trial sessions, pre-trial hearings, depositions, and pre-trial conferences.<sup>1</sup> The Tax Court does not believe it has the authority to issue a subpoena directing a third party to produce records in advance of a hearing to facilitate pre-trial discovery.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Efficient pre-trial discovery is an important means of limiting litigation and promoting settlement between the parties. The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (FRCP) prescribe the procedural rules that apply in most federal courts. FRCP Rule 45 allows for the use of subpoenas to secure pre-trial discovery of documents, including third-party documents to be produced prior to the scheduling of any hearing or deposition.<sup>2</sup> The Tax Court, however, is governed by Tax Court Rules rather than the FRCP. Unlike FRCP Rule 45, the analogous Tax Court rule (Tax Court Rule 147) does not provide for the use of subpoenas to enforce delivery of documents prior to a trial, apart from the scheduling of a deposition or hearing.<sup>3</sup>

The Tax Court’s authority to go beyond Tax Court Rule 147 was addressed in *Johnson v. Commissioner*.<sup>4</sup> In that case, the IRS issued a third-party subpoena to Bank of America to produce documents. The taxpayer assented to the subpoena. Likewise, Bank of America expressed a willingness to comply, but not before the date specified in a properly authorized subpoena.

1 Order, *Johnson v. Comm’r*, No. 17324-18 (T.C. Dec. 26, 2019); Order, *N. Donald LA Prop., LLC. v. Comm’r*, No. 24703-21 (T.C. Oct. 14, 2022).

2 FED. R. CIV. P. 45(a)(1)(A), (c)(2)(A).

3 TAX CT. R. 147(a)(1)(B); see, e.g., Kaelyn J. Romey, *No More Document Dumps or Secret Subpoenas: Amending the U.S. Tax Court Rules to Conform to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Streamlining Pretrial Discovery*, 4 BUS. ENTREPRENEURSHIP & TAX L. REV. 107 (2020), <http://scholarship.law.missouri.edu/betr/vol4/iss1/45>. Effective March 20, 2023, the Tax Court added Rule 147(a)(3) to conform closely to Rule 45(a)(4) of the FRCP by requiring that before a subpoena is served on a third party, a notice and copy of the subpoena must be served on each party to the case. The amendment to Rule 147(d) also provides protections for the person subject to the subpoena. See Press Release, U.S. Tax Ct. 92-93 (Mar. 20, 2023), <https://www.ustaxcourt.gov/resources/press/03202023.pdf>.

4 Order, *Johnson v. Comm’r*, No. 17324-18 (T.C. Dec. 26, 2019).

The IRS filed a motion asking the Tax Court to permit it to issue a subpoena directing Bank of America to produce the requested documents “prior to” the date of the scheduled trial session. The motion stated that obtaining the documents in advance of the scheduled trial might obviate the need for Bank of America to appear at the trial and facilitate settlement discussions with the taxpayer that might eliminate the need for a trial. The Tax Court stated that the IRS’s position was “not unreasonable” and that production of the documents might benefit all parties. Nevertheless, it concluded that it lacked the authority to issue such a subpoena. Under IRC § 7456(a), the Tax Court concluded it could only authorize a third-party subpoena to produce documents on the hearing date.

Recognizing the potential benefits arising from earlier document delivery, the Tax Court’s order discussed several workarounds the litigants could employ to secure the documents before trial. Subsequent guidance from the Tax Court and other Tax Court cases authorize document subpoena hearings prior to a case’s trial session.<sup>5</sup> Despite the use of the document subpoena hearings, the National Taxpayer Advocate believes there is no good reason the authority of the Tax Court should be more limited than the authority of other federal courts to issue subpoenas that would allow the parties to engage in pre-trial discovery to resolve or narrow issues without the need for judicial involvement.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 7456(a) to expand the authority of the Tax Court to issue subpoenas directing the production of records held by a third party prior to a scheduled hearing.

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<sup>5</sup> Order, *N. Donald LA Prop., LLC. v. Comm’r*, No. 24703-21 (T.C. Oct. 14, 2022); U.S. Tax Ct., Subpoenas For Remote Proceedings (Dec. 10, 2020), [https://www.ustaxcourt.gov/resources/zoomgov/subpoenas\\_for\\_remote\\_proceedings.pdf](https://www.ustaxcourt.gov/resources/zoomgov/subpoenas_for_remote_proceedings.pdf).

**Legislative Recommendation #48****Provide That the Scope of Judicial Review of Innocent Spouse Determinations Under IRC § 6015 Is *De Novo*****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* If the IRS denies a taxpayer's request for equitable relief in an innocent spouse case, the taxpayer may request judicial review of the IRS's denial, but in doing so, the taxpayer is generally prohibited from presenting evidence to a judge that the taxpayer did not previously present to the IRS, unless the evidence is newly discovered or was previously unavailable. This is true even if the requesting spouse was subjected to domestic violence or psychological abuse that caused that spouse not to present the evidence to the IRS. This limitation on introducing evidence can prevent taxpayers who otherwise qualify for innocent spouse relief from receiving it. It can fall particularly hard on unrepresented taxpayers who did not understand this requirement when they were dealing with the IRS.
- *Solution:* Revise IRC § 6015 to allow courts to consider all relevant evidence in reviewing requests for equitable relief in innocent spouse cases.

**PRESENT LAW**

Taxpayers who file joint federal income tax returns are jointly and severally liable for any deficiency or tax due in connection with their joint returns. IRC § 6015, sometimes referred to as the “innocent spouse” rules, provides relief from joint and several liability under certain circumstances. If traditional relief from a deficiency is unavailable under subsection (b) of IRC § 6015 and separation of liability relief from a deficiency is unavailable under subsection (c), a taxpayer may qualify for equitable relief from deficiencies and underpayments under subsection (f). Relief under IRC § 6015(f) is appropriate when, considering all the facts and circumstances of a case, it would be inequitable to hold a joint filer liable for the unpaid tax or deficiency. If the IRS denies relief under any subsection of IRC § 6015 or a request for relief has gone unanswered for six months, the taxpayer may file a petition with the U.S. Tax Court under IRC § 6015(e).

In recent years, there has been uncertainty regarding both the scope of review and the standard of review the Tax Court should apply in innocent spouse cases. In 2008, the Tax Court held that the scope of its review in IRC § 6015(f) cases, like its review in IRC § 6015(b) and (c) cases, is *de novo*, meaning it may consider evidence introduced at trial that was not included in the administrative record.<sup>1</sup> In 2009, the Tax Court held that the standard of review in IRC § 6015(f) cases, like its review in IRC § 6015(b) and (c) cases, is also *de novo*, meaning the Tax Court will consider the case anew, without deference to the IRS's determination.<sup>2</sup>

In 2009, the IRS Office of Chief Counsel (Chief Counsel) issued guidance to its attorneys instructing them to argue, contrary to the Tax Court's holdings, that judicial review in all IRC § 6015(f) cases is limited to issues and evidence presented before the IRS Appeals or Examination functions and that the proper standard of review is “abuse of discretion.”<sup>3</sup> In 2011, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommended that Congress amend IRC § 6015 to reflect the Tax Court's holdings and reject the IRS's position.

<sup>1</sup> *Porter v. Comm'r*, 130 T.C. 115 (2008).

<sup>2</sup> *Porter v. Comm'r*, 132 T.C. 203 (2009) (a continuation of the case that produced the 2008 holding).

<sup>3</sup> IRS Chief Counsel Notice CC-2009-021, Litigating Cases Involving Claims for Relief From Joint and Several Liability Under Section 6015(f): Scope and Standard of Review (June 30, 2009).

In June 2013, following an appellate court decision affirming the Tax Court's holdings, Chief Counsel issued guidance instructing its attorneys to cease arguing that the scope and standard of review in IRC § 6015(f) cases are not *de novo*.<sup>4</sup> In June 2013, Chief Counsel also issued an Action on Decision stating that although the IRS disagrees that IRC § 6015(e)(1) provides for both a *de novo* standard of review and a *de novo* scope of review, the IRS would no longer argue that the Tax Court should limit its scope of review in IRC § 6015(f) cases to the administrative record or its standard of review in IRC § 6015(f) claims solely for an abuse of discretion.<sup>5</sup>

In 2019, Congress added paragraph (7) to IRC § 6015(e). It provides that “any review of a determination made under this section is *de novo* by the Tax Court.”<sup>6</sup> However, this *de novo* review is limited to consideration of “(A) the administrative record established at the time of the determination, and (B) any additional newly discovered or previously unavailable evidence.” The provision does not define the terms “newly discovered”<sup>7</sup> or “previously unavailable.”<sup>8</sup>

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

IRC § 6015(e)(7), which limits the Tax Court's scope of review, applies to determinations made “under this section” (*i.e.*, IRC § 6015). Thus, the provision supersedes Tax Court jurisprudence regarding the review not only in IRC § 6015(f) cases, but also in cases involving the application of IRC § 6015(b) and (c).

The provision may be intended to encourage the IRS and taxpayers to compile a complete administrative record or resolve cases without litigation.<sup>9</sup> In some cases, however, taxpayers – particularly taxpayers not represented by counsel – may not understand the significance of certain evidence or the consequences of failing to present it to the IRS. In other cases, taxpayers may present relevant evidence during trial to a neutral third party – the judge – that they are reluctant to share with the IRS, such as evidence of the other joint filer's domestic violence or abuse.<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to imagine a state law that bars victims of domestic violence from introducing evidence at trial that goes beyond what they initially told police and was included in police records. The requirement that the Tax Court generally limit itself to considering evidence included in the administrative record – even where the requesting spouse suffered from domestic violence and otherwise meets the innocent spouse requirements – is similarly misguided. To enable the Tax Court to make the correct decision based on the merits of an innocent spouse claim, the National Taxpayer Advocate believes the court should be permitted to consider all evidence, whether or not it could have been provided to the IRS in a prior administrative proceeding.

4 IRS Chief Counsel Notice CC-2013-011, Litigating Cases That Involve Claims for Relief From Joint and Several Liability Under Section 6015 (June 7, 2013).

5 Action on Decision (AOD) 2012-07, I.R.B. 2013-25 (June 17, 2013), issued in response to *Wilson v. Comm'r*, 705 F.3d 980 (9th Cir. 2013), *aff'g* T.C. Memo. 2010-134. An AOD is a formal memorandum prepared by Chief Counsel that announces the litigation position the IRS will take in the future regarding the issue addressed in the AOD.

6 Taxpayer First Act, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1203, 133 Stat. 981, 988 (2019).

7 The Tax Court has defined “newly discovered” as “recently obtained sight or knowledge of for the first time.” See *Thomas v. Comm'r*, 160 T.C. 371 (2023).

8 In other cases, such as where a taxpayer raises innocent spouse as a defense in a deficiency case or the IRS does not issue a notice of determination, the Tax Court's scope and standard of review will continue to be *de novo*. See *Eze v. Comm'r*, No. 17486-19S (T.C. Jan. 21, 2022) and *Schnackel v. Comm'r*, T.C. Memo. 2024-76 (both cases following *Porter v. Comm'r*, 132 T.C. 203 (2009)).

9 See Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, Ref. No. 2024-300-001, *The Innocent Spouse Program Needs Improved Guidance for Employees and Increased Communication With Taxpayers* 5-6 (2023), <https://www.tigta.gov/reports/audit/innocent-spouse-program-needs-improved-guidance-employees-and-increased-communication> (the IRS did not fully develop facts and circumstances in 22 percent of examined cases; underdeveloped factors included domestic abuse, knowledge test, compliance, economic hardship, and mental/physical health).

10 Abuse that prevented a taxpayer from challenging the treatment of an item on a joint return out of fear the other spouse might retaliate would weigh in favor of granting relief. *Stephenson v. Comm'r*, T.C. Memo. 2011-16, is an example of a case in which the Tax Court's finding that the petitioner was physically and verbally abused by her husband was largely based on evidence produced at trial because the issue of abuse was not fully developed administratively.

Finally, some taxpayers who wish to obtain review by a federal court that is *de novo* in scope may pay the asserted tax and bring a refund suit before a U.S. district court or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. But this approach carries the risk that these courts may conclude they lack jurisdiction to hear innocent spouse claims.<sup>11</sup> To address these cases, and in recognition that innocent spouse claims often follow domestic violence or emotional abuse, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommends the statute be amended to allow all courts with jurisdiction over IRC § 6015 cases to consider all relevant evidence. The Treasury Department has made a similar proposal.<sup>12</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Remove IRC § 6015(e)(7)(A) and (B) and revise IRC § 6015(e)(7) to provide: “The standard and scope of review of any petition or request for relief filed under this section in the Tax Court or other court of competent jurisdiction shall be *de novo*.”<sup>13</sup>

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11 The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends that Congress address this risk. See *Clarify That Taxpayers May Raise Innocent Spouse Relief as a Defense in Collection, Bankruptcy, and Refund Cases*, *infra*.

12 See Dep’t of the Treasury, General Explanations of the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2025 Revenue Proposals 190 (*Allow the Tax Court to Review All Evidence in Innocent Spouse Relief Cases*).

13 This recommendation averts the possibility that the language in IRC § 6015(e)(7) that “[a]ny review of a determination under this section shall be reviewed *de novo* by the Tax Court” could be construed as conferring exclusive jurisdiction on the Tax Court to hear innocent spouse claims, which would preclude innocent spouse relief in collection, bankruptcy, and refund cases litigated in other federal courts and would be inconsistent with IRC § 6015(e)(1)(A) (conferring Tax Court jurisdiction “in addition to any other remedy provided by law”). Such an interpretation would also be inconsistent with the legislative recommendation *Clarify That Taxpayers May Raise Innocent Spouse Relief as a Defense in Collection, Bankruptcy, and Refund Cases*, *infra*.

## Legislative Recommendation #49

## Clarify That Taxpayers May Raise Innocent Spouse Relief as a Defense in Collection, Bankruptcy, and Refund Cases

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* Some federal courts have allowed taxpayers to make requests for innocent spouse relief in collection, bankruptcy, and refund cases, while others have not. As a result, similarly situated taxpayers are treated inconsistently and some taxpayers are left without any forum in which to seek innocent spouse relief before a court enters a financially damaging judgment.
- *Solution:* Clarify that U.S. district courts, bankruptcy courts, and the U.S. Court of Federal Claims have jurisdiction to grant innocent spouse relief in collection, bankruptcy, and refund cases.

### PRESENT LAW

Married taxpayers who file joint returns are jointly and severally liable for any deficiency or tax due. Spouses who live in community property states and file separate returns are generally required to report half the community income on their separate returns. As an exception, IRC §§ 6015 and 66, sometimes referred to as the “innocent spouse” rules, provide relief from joint and several liability and from the operation of community property rules. Taxpayers seeking innocent spouse relief generally must file IRS Form 8857, Request for Innocent Spouse Relief. After reviewing the request, the IRS issues a final notice of determination granting or denying relief in whole or in part.

The U.S. Tax Court has jurisdiction to determine the appropriate relief if a taxpayer files a petition: (1) within 90 days from the date the IRS mails its final notice of determination, or (2) if the IRS fails to issue a notice of determination, no earlier than six months after the request for innocent spouse relief is made.<sup>1</sup> Under IRC § 6015(e)(1)(A), the Tax Court’s jurisdiction to decide innocent spouse claims does not appear to be exclusive.<sup>2</sup> IRC § 6015(e)(1)(A) provides that an individual may petition the Tax Court for review of an innocent spouse determination “[i]n addition to any other remedy provided by law.”

The Tax Court is the only prepayment judicial forum in which a taxpayer may obtain review of an adverse IRS determination. However, there is no right to a jury trial in the Tax Court. Moreover, while the standard of review of a denial of a claim for innocent spouse relief under IRC § 6015 is *de novo*, the scope of the Tax Court’s review is limited to “(A) the administrative record established at the time of the determination, and (B) any additional newly discovered or previously unavailable evidence.”<sup>3</sup>

The Tax Court does not have jurisdiction over collection suits arising under IRC §§ 7402 and 7403, over bankruptcy proceedings arising under Title 11 of the United States Code, or over refund suits arising under IRC § 7422. Some federal courts with jurisdiction in these cases have considered taxpayers’ innocent spouse

1 IRC § 6015(e)(1)(A). The Tax Court may also have jurisdiction where the taxpayer requests innocent spouse relief as an affirmative defense. See, e.g., *Van Arsdalen v. Comm’r*, 123 T.C. 135 (2004) (deficiency proceeding); *Estate of Wenner v. Comm’r*, 116 T.C. 284 (2001) (interest abatement proceeding).

2 Under IRC § 6015(e)(3), the Tax Court loses jurisdiction in refund cases. See *Coggin v. Comm’r*, 157 T.C. 144 (2021).

3 IRC § 6015(e)(7). This provision was enacted as part of the Taxpayer First Act, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1203, 133 Stat. 981, 988 (2019). The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends revising IRC § 6015(e)(7) to remove this limitation on the Tax Court’s scope of review. See *Provide That the Scope of Judicial Review of Innocent Spouse Determinations Under IRC § 6015 Is De Novo*, *supra*. The Treasury Department has made a similar proposal. See Department of the Treasury, General Explanations of the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2025 Revenue Proposals 190-191 (*Allow the Tax Court to Review All Evidence in Innocent Spouse Relief Cases*), <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/131/General-Explanations-FY2025.pdf>.

claims, which is consistent with IRC § 6015(e)(1)(A).<sup>4</sup> However, other federal courts have held that the Tax Court’s jurisdiction to decide innocent spouse claims is exclusive and have declined to consider such claims in collection, bankruptcy, and refund cases.<sup>5</sup>

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

Inconsistent decisions about whether taxpayers may seek innocent spouse relief in collection, bankruptcy, and refund cases have created confusion and resulted in inconsistent treatment of similarly situated taxpayers. In addition, treating the Tax Court as having exclusive jurisdiction over innocent spouse claims may deprive some taxpayers of their day in court. If other federal courts decide they cannot consider innocent spouse claims in collection, bankruptcy, and refund cases, taxpayers in those cases may be left without any forum in which to seek innocent spouse relief before a court enters a financially damaging judgment or, in rare cases, a taxpayer loses his or her home to foreclosure. At the same time, taxpayers forced to raise their innocent spouse claims in Tax Court will be deprived of a *de novo* scope of review that would be available in other federal courts.

Legislation is needed to clarify that the statutory language of IRC § 6015, which confers Tax Court jurisdiction “in addition to any other remedy provided by law,” does not give the Tax Court exclusive jurisdiction to determine innocent spouse claims and that U.S. district courts, bankruptcy courts, and the U.S. Court of Federal Claims may also consider whether innocent spouse relief should be granted.<sup>6</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC §§ 6015 and 66 to clarify that taxpayers are entitled to raise innocent spouse relief as a defense in proceedings brought under any provision of Title 26 (including §§ 6213, 6320, 6330, 7402, 7403, and 7422) and in cases arising under Title 11 of the United States Code.

4 See, e.g., *United States v. Diehl*, 460 F. Supp. 1282 (S.D. Tex. 1978), *aff’d per curiam*, 586 F.2d 1080 (5th Cir. 1978) (IRC § 7402 suit to reduce an assessment to judgment); *In re Pendergraft*, 119 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 1229 (Bankr. S.D. Tex. 2017) (bankruptcy proceeding); *In re Bowman*, 129 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 909 (Bankr. E.D. La. 2022) (bankruptcy proceeding); and *Hockin v. United States*, 400 F. Supp. 3d 1085, 1092 n.2 (D. Or. 2019) (refund suit).

5 *United States v. Boynton*, 99 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 920 (S.D. Cal. 2007) (IRC § 7402 suit to reduce an assessment to judgment); *United States v. Cawog*, 97 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 3069 (W.D. Pa. 2006) (IRC § 7403 suit to foreclose on federal tax liens); *In re Mikels*, 524 B.R. 805 (Bankr. S.D. Ind. 2015) (bankruptcy proceeding); *Chandler v. United States*, 338 F. Supp. 3d 592 (N.D. Tex. 2018) (refund suit); and *Geary v. United States*, 650 B.R. 486 (Bankr. W.D. Pa. 2023) (bankruptcy proceeding).

6 As noted above, IRC § 6015(e)(7) provides that “[a]ny review of a determination under this section shall be reviewed *de novo* by the Tax Court and shall be based upon – (A) the administrative record established at the time of the determination, and (B) any additional newly discovered or previously unavailable evidence.” The National Taxpayer Advocate agrees that the standard and scope of Tax Court review of innocent spouse cases should be *de novo*. However, the new provision could be construed as conferring exclusive jurisdiction on the Tax Court to hear innocent spouse claims, which would be inconsistent with IRC § 6015(e)(1)(A). For this reason, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommends clarifying that the scope and standard of review are *de novo* in innocent spouse cases adjudicated by the Tax Court “or other court of competent jurisdiction,” thereby avoiding the inference that the Tax Court has exclusive jurisdiction over innocent spouse claims. See *Provide That the Scope of Judicial Review of Innocent Spouse Determinations Under IRC § 6015 Is De Novo*, *supra*.

**Legislative Recommendation #50****Fix the Donut Hole in the Tax Court's Jurisdiction to Determine Overpayments by Non-Filers With Filing Extensions****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* A “donut hole” in the Tax Court’s jurisdiction prevents it from reviewing some taxpayer refund claims. This unusual situation arises when taxpayers overpay their tax obligations, receive a six-month filing extension but do not file a return, and later receive a notice of deficiency from the IRS. The Tax Court’s jurisdiction to review refund claims in these circumstances is uncertain, which harms taxpayers.
- *Solution:* Amend IRC § 6512(b)(3) to clarify that the Tax Court has jurisdiction to review refund claims by taxpayers affected by the existing “donut hole.”

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6511(a) provides that the limitations period for filing a claim for refund generally expires two years after paying the tax or three years after filing the return, whichever is later. The amount a taxpayer can recover is limited to amounts paid within the applicable lookback period provided by IRC § 6511(b)(2). If a taxpayer files a claim within three years of the original return, the lookback period is three years, plus any filing extension. If a taxpayer does not file a claim within three years of the return or the taxpayer never filed a return, the lookback period is two years. IRC § 6513(b) provides that withholding and amounts paid as estimated tax are deemed paid on the original due date of the return, which means taxpayers who have overpaid generally cannot claim a refund more than two years later unless they file a return.

When the IRS proposes to assess additional tax, it ordinarily must issue a notice of deficiency to the taxpayer, who can then seek review in the U.S. Tax Court if they disagree with the IRS’s position.<sup>1</sup> If the taxpayer files a timely petition, the Tax Court generally has jurisdiction under IRC § 6512(b) to determine whether the taxpayer is due a refund for the tax year at issue. The refund is limited to the tax paid within a specified period. The relevant period here is described in IRC § 6512(b)(3)(B), which limits the refund to tax paid during the applicable two- or three-year lookback period in IRC § 6511(b)(2), running from the date the IRS mailed the notice of deficiency.

In 1996, the Supreme Court held in *Commissioner v. Lundy* that the language in IRC § 6512(b)(3)(B) meant that the two-year lookback period applied to a taxpayer who had not filed a return before the IRS mailed a notice of deficiency.<sup>2</sup> The IRS had mailed the notice in the third year after the return’s filing deadline, and the Court determined that the taxpayer was unable to recover overpayments from withholding since they were deemed paid on the original due date of the return, which was more than two years from the date of the notice of deficiency.

The Supreme Court’s interpretation created a disparity between non-filers who received notices of deficiency during the third year after the return was due and taxpayers who similarly received such a notice but had filed returns on or before the notice’s date. Non-filers were subject to the two-year lookback period and thus unable to recover overpayments attributable to withholding and estimated taxes because those amounts were deemed paid on the due date of the return, which was outside the two-year window. By contrast, filers were subject

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<sup>1</sup> IRC §§ 6212, 6213.

<sup>2</sup> 516 U.S. 235 (1996).

to the three-year lookback period and could be refunded those overpayments. In 1997, Congress added flush language to IRC § 6512(b)(3) to eliminate the disparity by extending the lookback period for non-filing taxpayers from two years to three years when the IRS mailed the notice of deficiency “during the third year after the due date (with extensions) for filing the return.”<sup>3</sup>

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

The 1997 law may not entirely fix the problem it was enacted to solve. According to the legislative history, Congress enacted the special rule of IRC § 6512(b)(3) to put non-filers who receive notices of deficiency within three years after the date the return was due on the same footing as taxpayers who file returns on or before the IRS mails the notice of deficiency. The special rule was supposed to allow non-filers “who receive a notice of deficiency and file suit to contest it in Tax Court during the third year after the return due date to obtain a refund of excessive amounts paid within the three-year period prior to the date of the deficiency notice.”<sup>4</sup>

In 2017, the Tax Court interpreted the law in a way that has created a jurisdictional “donut hole” for taxpayers who filed for an extension but did not subsequently file their return. In *Borenstein v. Commissioner*, the Tax Court concluded that it lacked jurisdiction to determine a non-filer’s overpayment because the non-filer had requested a six-month extension to file and the IRS had mailed the notice of deficiency during the first six months of the third year following the original due date – *i.e.*, after the second year following the due date (without extensions) and before the third year following the due date (with extensions).<sup>5</sup> Under the Tax Court’s reading of the statute, the words “with extensions” can delay by six months the beginning of the “third year after the due date” for non-filers who received filing extensions but do not file and who then receive a notice of deficiency from the IRS.

This unintended glitch opens a six-month “donut hole” during which the IRS can send deficiency notices to taxpayers without triggering the Tax Court’s jurisdiction to consider the refund claims of those taxpayers. Although the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit reversed the Tax Court’s decision, the Tax Court is not required to follow the Second Circuit’s decision in cases arising in other circuits.<sup>6</sup> Thus, unless the Tax Court revisits its own precedent, a legislative fix is still needed.

*Example:* For tax year 2018, John Doe made timely estimated tax payments in excess of his tax liability, so the tax was deemed paid on April 15, 2019. He requested a six-month extension of time to file his return, but he ultimately did not file. On July 2, 2021, the IRS mailed him a notice of deficiency for the 2018 tax year. He responded to the notice by petitioning the Tax Court and explaining the notice was incorrect because he had paid the asserted deficiency. He then filed a tax return showing he had overpaid his tax and was due a refund. Because Mr. Doe did not file a return previously, the general rule of IRC § 6512 limits the Tax Court to refunding payments made within two years of the date on the notice of deficiency, without regard to extensions (*i.e.*, for taxes paid on or after July 2, 2019). This rule would not help Mr. Doe because he paid his taxes on April 15, 2019, which is more than two years before the date of the notice of deficiency.

3 Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, Pub. L. No. 105-34, § 1282(a), 111 Stat. 788, 1037 (1997); H.R. REP. NO. 105-220, at 701 (1997) (Conf. Rep.).

4 H.R. REP. NO. 105-220, at 701 (1997) (Conf. Rep.).

5 *Borenstein v. Comm’r*, 149 T.C. 263 (2017), *rev’d*, 919 F.3d 746 (2d Cir. 2019). See also *O’Connell v. Comm’r*, No. 6587-20 (T.C. May 20, 2021) (settled in accordance with the *Borenstein* precedent).

6 *Golsen v. Comm’r*, 54 T.C. 742, 757 (1970), *aff’d*, 445 F.2d 985 (10th Cir. 1971).

Under the Tax Court’s interpretation of the statute, the flush language in IRC § 6512 also would not help Mr. Doe, because it would only apply if the IRS had mailed the notice of deficiency during the third year after the due date of his return (with extensions) (*i.e.*, the year beginning after October 15, 2021). Because the IRS mailed his notice of deficiency before the third year had begun, the special rule did not apply, and John Doe could not get his refund.

This glitch arises when the IRS issues a notice deficiency after the regular filing deadline (generally, April 15) and not later than the extended filing deadline (generally, October 15) if the taxpayer requested an extension but did not file a return.

The Tax Court’s interpretation appears inconsistent with the legislative fix that Congress enacted to assist certain non-filers in response to *Lundy*. Although this problem affects a relatively limited number of taxpayers, the National Taxpayer Advocate believes it is important to highlight the unintended glitch and recommend a solution.<sup>7</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend the flush language in IRC § 6512(b)(3) by inserting the word “original” before “due date” and striking the parenthetical clause “(with extensions).”

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<sup>7</sup> For more detail, see Nina E. Olson, The Second Circuit in *Borenstein* Helped to Close the Gap in the Tax Court’s Refund Jurisdiction, But Only for Taxpayers in that Circuit, NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE BLOG (Apr. 24, 2019), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog/ntablog-the-second-circuit-in-borenstein-helped-to-close-the-gap-in-the-tax-courts-refund-jurisdiction-but-only-for-taxpayers-in-that-circuit/2019/04>.

## MISCELLANEOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Legislative Recommendation #51

## Restructure the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to Make It Simpler for Taxpayers and Reduce Improper Payments

### SUMMARY

- *Problem:* The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is one of the federal government's largest anti-poverty programs, but its eligibility requirements are complex. As a result, millions of eligible taxpayers fail to claim the EITC, while other taxpayers claim amounts for which they are not eligible, leading to a high "improper payments" rate.
- *Solution:* Simplify the EITC by separating it into a "worker credit" and a "child credit," remove age limits for claiming the EITC, and treat unemployment compensation as earned income.<sup>1</sup>

### PRESENT LAW

The EITC is a refundable tax credit for low- and moderate-income working individuals and families.<sup>2</sup> Eligibility for the EITC and the amount of EITC a taxpayer may claim are based on a variety of factors, including the taxpayer's earned income, the number of qualifying children, and the taxpayer's filing status. The EITC is not available to taxpayers who have disqualified income (*e.g.*, investment income such as dividends, capital gains, and rental income) that exceeds the applicable limit (\$11,600 for tax year (TY) 2024).<sup>3</sup> Taxpayers without qualifying children may claim the EITC (commonly referred to as the "childless EITC"), but only if they are between the ages of 25 and 64.<sup>4</sup>

The EITC is structured so that as earned income rises, the credit phases in, plateaus at a maximum amount, and then phases out. The phase-in, maximum, and phase-out amounts depend on the taxpayer's filing status and the number of qualifying children. The maximum credit for TY 2024 is \$632 if the taxpayer has no qualifying children, \$4,213 with one qualifying child, \$6,960 with two qualifying children, and \$7,830 with three or more qualifying children.<sup>5</sup>

An individual must meet three primary requirements to be a taxpayer's qualifying child for the EITC.<sup>6</sup> First, the individual must have a specific blood or legal relationship to the taxpayer.<sup>7</sup> Second, the individual must

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1 The National Taxpayer Advocate also recommends that Congress simplify and update the definition of "qualifying child" as used in the EITC and other tax provisions to reflect modern family structures. See *Adopt a Consistent and More Modern Definition of "Qualifying Child" Throughout the Internal Revenue Code*, *infra*.

2 IRC § 32.

3 IRS, Earned Income and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Tables (Aug. 26, 2024), <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit/earned-income-and-earned-income-tax-credit-eitc-tables>.

4 IRC § 32(c)(1)(A)(ii).

5 IRS, Earned Income and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Tables (Aug. 26, 2024), <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit/earned-income-and-earned-income-tax-credit-eitc-tables>.

6 Where there are competing claims for the same child, "tie breaker" rules prioritize the claims. IRC § 152(c)(4)(B).

7 IRC §§ 32(c)(3)(A), 152(c)(2).

share a residence in the United States with the taxpayer for more than half the year.<sup>8</sup> Third, the individual must be under the age of 19 (or under age 24 if a full-time student) or be permanently and totally disabled.<sup>9</sup>

Unemployment compensation (UC) is based on a taxpayer's earned income and is included in adjusted gross income (AGI) under IRC § 85, but it is generally *not included* in earned income under IRC § 32 and thus does not count in computing the amount of EITC for which a taxpayer is eligible.

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

Enacted in 1975, the EITC is one of the federal government's largest anti-poverty programs for low-income workers.<sup>10</sup> For TY 2022, taxpayers filed over 23 million returns claiming EITC benefits worth about \$61 billion.<sup>11</sup> Overall, the EITC is considered to be an effective anti-poverty program, but its eligibility requirements are complex. As a result, some taxpayers who are eligible for the credit fail to claim it, missing out on this important benefit.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the program suffers from a relatively high rate of improper payments that could be reduced if the eligibility requirements were simplified.<sup>13</sup>

### Restructure EITC as Two Credits: A Worker Credit and a Child Credit

The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends restructuring the EITC into two credits: (i) a refundable *worker credit* based on each individual worker's earned income, irrespective of the presence of a qualifying child, and (ii) a refundable *child credit* that would reflect the costs of caring for one or more children.

**Worker Credit.** Much like the current EITC, the worker credit would phase in as a percentage of earned income, reach a plateau, and then phase out.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the current EITC, the credit amount would depend solely on income and would not vary based on whether the taxpayer is claiming one or more qualifying children. Increasing the worker component of the EITC would provide a greater incentive to work, which is a main objective of the credit. This change could also substantially reduce improper payments. The IRS receives Forms W-2 and other information reporting documents directly from employers and other payors of income. For that reason, it can accurately verify income amounts for EITC recipients who are employees, who constitute by far the largest group of EITC claimants.<sup>15</sup>

**Child Credit.** The child credit would be designed as a fixed amount per qualifying child, subject to an AGI phase-out, and would replace the portion of the existing EITC that is based on the number of qualifying children. It could be consolidated with or replace the Child Tax Credit (CTC). This could be accomplished in various ways, and proposals to expand the CTC might provide a starting point for developing the new

<sup>8</sup> IRC § 32(c)(3)(C).

<sup>9</sup> IRC §§ 32(c)(3)(A), 152(c)(3). The individual must also have a Social Security number that is valid for employment. IRC § 32(c)(3)(D), (m).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Nicardo McInnis et al., *The Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty and Public Assistance: Evidence from the Earned Income Tax Credit* 5-6 (Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Rsch., Working Paper No. 31429, 2023), <https://www.nber.org/papers/w31429> (highlighting analyses of the credit's impacts on low-income workers).

<sup>11</sup> IRS, Compliance Data Warehouse, Individual Return Transaction File, TY 2022 (Aug. 22, 2024).

<sup>12</sup> Approximately 20 percent of eligible taxpayers do not claim the EITC. See IRS, EITC Participation Rate by States Tax Years 2014 through 2021 (Aug. 9, 2024), <https://www.eitc.irs.gov/eitc-central/participation-rate-by-state/eitc-participation-rate-by-states>.

<sup>13</sup> An improper payment is generally "any payment that should not have been made or that was made in an incorrect amount, including an overpayment or underpayment, under a statutory, contractual, administrative, or other legally applicable requirement" and includes "any payment to an ineligible recipient." 31 U.S.C. § 3351(4). For fiscal year 2023, the IRS estimates that nearly 33 percent of the total EITC program payments were improper. Payment Accuracy, Fiscal Year 2023 (Jan. 23, 2024).

<sup>14</sup> For examples regarding how a per-worker credit might be structured, see ELAINE MAAG, URBAN INST., *INVESTING IN WORK BY REFORMING THE EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT* (2015), <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/investing-work-reforming-earned-income-tax-credit>.

<sup>15</sup> A relatively small percentage of EITC claimants are self-employed individuals. The IRS generally receives less information from third-party payors with respect to self-employed individuals.

credit.<sup>16</sup> The National Taxpayer Advocate also recommends that Congress standardize and modernize the definition of “qualifying child” used in the tax code, which is discussed in a separate Legislative Recommendation.<sup>17</sup>

### Remove Age Eligibility Restrictions

As described above, the childless EITC is generally available only to taxpayers between the ages of 25 and 64. For 2021 only, Congress expanded the age range of eligible workers to include adults over the age of 18 (age 24 for students) and made qualified homeless and former foster youth eligible to claim the credit at age 18.<sup>18</sup> The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends making the 2021 changes permanent. There are an estimated 33 million individuals under the age of 25 and over the age of 64 who are participating in the workforce, which includes about 22 million individuals under the age of 25 and about 11 million individuals over the age of 64.<sup>19</sup> Consistent with the EITC program’s dual mission of alleviating poverty and providing a work incentive, individuals who are over the age of 18 (age 24 for students) should not be excluded from EITC eligibility. Further, the age limit should be reduced to age 18 for qualified homeless and former foster youth due to the particular challenges these individuals face.

### Unemployment Compensation

Taxpayers who receive UC based on their employment earnings cannot use their UC income to qualify for the EITC. The apparent rationale for not counting UC is that the EITC was designed largely to provide a work incentive. However, UC is paid exclusively to individuals who were working and became separated from their jobs due to no fault of their own. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, millions of individuals lost their jobs when certain segments of the economy, including restaurants, hotels, and airlines, substantially reduced their workforces. In other instances, local disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and wildfires adversely affect segments of the economy and lead to mass layoffs. Because UC is effectively a replacement for a portion of the wages working individuals would have earned if they had not been separated from their jobs and because UC benefits are only paid for a limited number of months, treating UC as earned income solely for purposes of the EITC would provide additional support for low-income families, while still maintaining the nexus between working and receiving the EITC.<sup>20</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Separate the EITC into two refundable components: a worker credit and a child credit.<sup>21</sup>

16 See, e.g., American Family Act, H.R. 3899, 118th Cong. § 2 (2023); Working Families Tax Relief Act of 2023, S. 1992, 118th Cong. § 201 (2023); Press Release, Office of Sen. Mitt Romney, *Romney, Burr, Daines Announce Family Security Act 2.0* (June 15, 2022), <https://www.romney.senate.gov/romney-burr-daines-announce-family-security-act-2-0>.

17 See *Adopt a Consistent and More Modern Definition of “Qualifying Child” Throughout the Internal Revenue Code*, *infra*.

18 American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2, § 9621, 135 Stat. 4, 152-153 (2021) (codified at IRC § 32(n)).

19 U.S. BUREAU OF LAB. STAT., EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS: TABLE 3.1, CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE BY AGE, SEX, RACE, AND ETHNICITY (modified Aug. 29, 2024), <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/civilian-labor-force-summary.htm>. Note that the data include workers who are 16, 17, and 18 years old. This legislative recommendation would not apply to these individuals except for 18-year-olds who are qualified homeless and former foster youth.

20 We recognize an unintended consequence of including UC in earned income is that it may diminish a taxpayer’s EITC claim, and in some instances, may make taxpayers ineligible to claim the EITC.

21 The National Taxpayer Advocate also recommends that Congress simplify and modernize the definition of “qualifying child” as used throughout the code. See *Adopt a Consistent and More Modern Definition of “Qualifying Child” Throughout the Internal Revenue Code*, *infra*.

- Expand the age eligibility for the EITC to individuals who have attained age 19 (age 18 in the case of qualified homeless or former foster youth and age 24 for specified students), with no upper age limit.<sup>22</sup>
- Amend IRC § 32(c)(2)(A)(i) to include UC as EITC-qualifying earned income.

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<sup>22</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Working Families Tax Relief Act of 2023 § 101(a), (b), 118th Cong. (2023). Other bills would allow the childless EITC for working individuals who are age 18 and older. *See, e.g.*, Lower Your Taxes Act, H.R. 5953 § 3(e), 118th Cong. (2023); EITC Age Parity Act of 2023, H.R. 5689 § 2, 118th Cong. (2023); EITC Modernization Act, H.R. 5421 § 3(f), 118th Cong. (2023); Worker Relief and Credit Reform Act of 2023, H.R. 1468 § 2(b), 118th Cong. (2023). *See also* EITC for Older Workers Act of 2024, H.R. 9361 § 2, 118th Cong. (2024) (repealing the upper age limit).

**Legislative Recommendation #52****Adopt a Consistent and More Modern Definition of “Qualifying Child” Throughout the Internal Revenue Code****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Numerous provisions in the tax code use the term “qualifying child,” but they contain several different definitions of the term. These inconsistent definitions are confusing to taxpayers. The different definitions make compliance difficult, causing some taxpayers to fail to claim tax benefits for which they qualify and other taxpayers to claim tax benefits for which they do not qualify, which subjects them to liability for additional tax, penalties, and interest. Furthermore, the relationship test embedded in the definitions has not been updated to reflect the rise of non-traditional families and childcare arrangements, preventing certain primary caregivers from receiving benefits.
- *Solution:* Adopt a consistent and more modern definition of the term “qualifying child” throughout the tax code by using a consistent age requirement, removing or revising the relationship test to expand eligibility to modern families, and revising the definition of a “qualifying relative” to allow a taxpayer to claim the qualifying child of another taxpayer who is entitled to claim the child but does not do so.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 152(a) broadly defines a “dependent” as a qualifying child or a qualifying relative.<sup>1</sup> IRC § 152(c) defines the term “qualifying child.” In general, to be a qualifying child under IRC § 152(c), an individual must: (1) be under age 19, or age 24 if a student, unless permanently and totally disabled; (2) be the taxpayer’s child, stepchild, foster child, brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister, stepbrother, stepsister, or a descendant of any of them; (3) live with the taxpayer for more than half the year; (4) not provide more than one-half of the individual’s own support during the year; and (5) not file a joint return for the year.

IRC § 152(c) is meant to provide a uniform definition of a qualifying child for five tax benefits: head-of-household (HoH) filing status, the Child and Dependent Care Credit, the Child Tax Credit (CTC), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the dependency exemption.<sup>2</sup> The definition also affects eligibility for other provisions like premature distributions from tax-favored accounts for medical and education expenses, dependent care assistance programs, and family member fringe benefits.<sup>3</sup>

The Working Families Tax Relief Act of 2004<sup>4</sup> added the uniform definition to the tax code. At that time, Congress concluded the use of multiple definitions contributed to a lack of clarity.<sup>5</sup> Despite these efforts, there are still parts of the tax code that deviate from the uniform definition. For example, while the uniform definition requires a qualifying child be under age 19 (or age 24 if a student), the CTC may only be claimed with respect to children under age 17.<sup>6</sup> Another example: The term “qualifying child” and the relationships

<sup>1</sup> IRC § 152(a).

<sup>2</sup> IRC §§ 2(b), 21, 24, 32, 151. The dependency exemption is paused through 2025. IRC § 151(d)(5).

<sup>3</sup> IRC §§ 81, 129, 132.

<sup>4</sup> Pub. L. No. 108-311, § 201, 118 Stat. 1166, 1169-1165 (2004).

<sup>5</sup> STAFF OF J. COMM. ON TAX’N, 109TH CONG., GEN. EXPLANATION OF TAX LEGIS. ENACTED IN THE 108TH CONG. 124-125, JCS-5-05 (J. Comm. Print 2005), <https://www.jct.gov/publications/2005/jcs-5-05/>.

<sup>6</sup> IRC §§ 24(c)(4), 152(c)(3).

described in IRC § 152(c)(2) encompass several types of familial relationships, including grandchildren, but in the case of a married taxpayer who is seeking to be treated as unmarried for purposes of claiming HoH filing status, only a son or daughter meets the definition of a qualifying child – grandchildren do not qualify.<sup>7</sup>

IRC § 152(d) defines the term “qualifying relative.” Under IRC § 152(d)(1)(D), one criterion for being a qualifying relative of a taxpayer is that the individual “is not a qualifying child of such taxpayer or any other taxpayer....” This provision, as currently written, excludes children who could be claimed as qualifying children by another taxpayer but are not.

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

### Consistency Reduces Confusion and Eases Administration

The deviations from a uniform definition are needlessly confusing. Not surprisingly, many taxpayers do not understand the differences in requirements. They may assume that if a child is “qualifying” for purposes of one IRC provision, the child is qualifying for all IRC provisions. Conversely, they may assume that if a child is not qualifying for purposes of one IRC provision, the child is not a qualifying child for any IRC provision.<sup>8</sup> This confusion can result in taxpayers filing inaccurate tax returns, which may lead to audits and additional tax liabilities, plus penalties and interest charges. It can also result in taxpayers failing to claim benefits to which they are entitled. For example, in tax year 2021, about 14 percent of taxpayers with children who are eligible to receive EITC benefits did not claim them.<sup>9</sup>

Confusion also increases the administrative burden on the IRS, as it must program its return processing systems using different definitions for different provisions, it must program its audit selection models to distinguish among conflicting definitions, and it must devote audit and collection resources to reporting inaccuracies that exist solely because taxpayers and even some tax preparers confuse the various definitions when filling out tax returns.

### The Relationship Test Prevents Primary Caregivers From Receiving Certain Tax Benefits

The uniform definition and other eligibility rules for family-focused tax benefits, such as the EITC and CTC, were written when two-parent households predominated. Living arrangements have since evolved. Blended families, multigenerational family arrangements, divorce, and cohabitation have become more common.<sup>10</sup> Childcare arrangements have become complex as more children split their time between different households, and four percent of children live with or are supported by non-parent relatives and others.<sup>11</sup>

When children are raised or informally fostered by nonqualified relatives or family friends, benefits like the EITC and CTC cannot be properly claimed. Taxpayers can only receive the child-related portion of the EITC

<sup>7</sup> IRC §§ 152, 7703(b).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, Ref. No. 2021-40-070, *Addressing Complex and Inconsistent Earned Income Tax Credit and Additional Child Tax Credit Rules May Reduce Unintentional Errors and Increase Participation* 6-7 (2021), <https://www.tigta.gov/reports/audit/addressing-complex-and-inconsistent-earned-income-tax-credit-and-additional-child-tax>.

<sup>9</sup> IRS/Census Exact Match, Project 6000463. Release authorization CBDRB-FY24-CES004-016, CBDRB-FY24-CES026-014, CBDRB-FY24-CES004-018.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., LYDIA R. ANDERSON ET AL., U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, P70-174, CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS, LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF CHILDREN: 2019 (Feb. 2022), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/demo/p70-174.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Jacob Goldin & Ariel Jurow Kleiman, *Whose Child Is This? Improving Child-Claiming Rules in Safety-Net Programs*, 131 YALE L.J. 1719 (2022), <https://www.yalelawjournal.org/article/whose-child-is-this>; ELAINE MAAG ET AL., URBAN INST., INCREASING FAMILY COMPLEXITY AND VOLATILITY: THE DIFFICULTY IN DETERMINING CHILD TAX BENEFITS 11 (2016), <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/increasing-family-complexity-and-volatility-difficulty-determining-child-tax-benefits>; LYDIA R. ANDERSON ET AL., U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, P70-174, CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS, LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF CHILDREN: 2019, at 3 tbl.1, (Feb. 2022), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/demo/p70-174.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, *Historical Living Arrangements of Children*, Fig. CH-1 (Nov. 2023), <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/children.html>.

and the CTC when they have a qualifying child, not a qualifying relative.<sup>12</sup> The IRC § 152(c)(2) relationship test for a qualifying child restricts eligibility to only a few close relatives.<sup>13</sup> This test mainly excludes children who live in low-income households.<sup>14</sup> It is estimated that the relationship test excludes two million children for purposes of some CTC benefits.<sup>15</sup> A child who does not live with a sufficiently close relative cannot be claimed by anyone.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the relationship rules where a taxpayer is seeking to be treated as unmarried for purposes of HoH filing status prevent the taxpayer from claiming grandchildren.<sup>17</sup>

Congress can address these shortcomings by modernizing the uniform definition of a qualifying child, as the current definition often no longer reflects real-life living arrangements. The definition should be amended to encompass more types of families. The overly restrictive relationship test of IRC § 152(c)(2) should be expanded to include additional categories of relatives or replaced with a holistic primary caregiver standard.<sup>18</sup> The residency test and other requirements should remain in place to ensure the tax benefits are going to taxpayers providing care to children in their household.<sup>19</sup>

To allow heads of non-traditional families to claim children they care for as dependents, another amendment to the current IRC § 152 rules would make a significant difference – adding the words “claimed as” to IRC § 152(d)(1)(D), so the term “qualifying relative” means an individual who is not *claimed as* a qualifying child of such taxpayer or of any other taxpayer for any taxable year in the calendar year in which such taxable year begins. That language would also conform to the language used in IRC § 152(c)(4)(C) that allows a taxpayer other than a parent to claim a qualifying child. Under that provision, if the parents may claim a qualifying child but neither parent does so, the child may be claimed as the qualifying child of another taxpayer if the adjusted gross income of that taxpayer is higher than the highest adjusted gross income of either parent.<sup>20</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt a consistent and more modern definition of the term “qualifying child” throughout the IRC.
- Use a consistent age when defining a “qualifying child.”
- Modernize the definition of a qualifying child in IRC § 152(c) to reflect evolving family units either by expanding the relationship test described in IRC § 152(c)(1)(A) and (2) to include additional categories of relatives or by replacing the relationship test of IRC § 152(c)(1)(A) and (2) with a primary caregiver standard.
- Amend IRC § 152(d)(1)(D) to provide that the term “qualifying relative” means an individual “who is not claimed as a qualifying child of such taxpayer or of any other taxpayer for any taxable year in the calendar year in which such taxable year begins.”

12 IRC §§ 24, 32, 152.

13 IRC § 152(c).

14 See Jacob Goldin & Katherine Michelmore, *Who Benefits from the Child Tax Credit?* (Nat’l Bureau of Econ. Rsch., Working Paper No. 27940, 2021), <http://www.nber.org/papers/w27940>.

15 *Id.* at 19, 29 tbl.3.

16 IRC §§ 24(c), 152(c).

17 IRC §§ 2(b), 152(f)(1), 7703(b).

18 Relevant considerations should include which adult performs caregiving and makes caregiving decisions for the child, including factors like who prepares meals, who transports the child to school, and who makes medical appointments for the child. For a more detailed discussion on modernizing the definition of a qualifying child, see National Taxpayer Advocate Fiscal Year 2020 Objectives Report to Congress vol. 3, at 17 (*Earned Income Tax Credit: Making the EITC Work for Taxpayers and the Government*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/JRC20\\_Volume3.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/JRC20_Volume3.pdf); see also Ariel Jurow Kleiman, *Revolutionizing Redistribution: Tax Credits and the American Rescue Plan*, 131 YALE L.J. FORUM 535, 555-556 (2021), <https://www.yalelawjournal.org/forum/revolutionizing-redistribution-tax-credits-and-the-american-rescue-plan>.

19 See IRC § 152(c)(1)(B)-(E).

20 See IRC § 152(c)(4)(C).

**Legislative Recommendation #53****Permanently Give Taxpayers Affected by Federally Declared Disasters the Option of Using Prior Year Earned Income to Claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* A low-income worker who loses their job due to a federally declared disaster may suffer a double financial hit – loss of earned income and loss of Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) benefits. On several occasions, Congress has mitigated this impact by allowing taxpayers affected by federally declared disasters to claim EITC benefits based on their prior year's earned income. But on other occasions, similarly affected taxpayers did not receive this relief.
- *Solution:* Establish a general rule giving taxpayers in federally declared disaster areas the option of claiming EITC benefits based on their prior year's earned income.

**PRESENT LAW**

The EITC is a refundable credit for low- and moderate-income working families. Eligibility for the EITC and the amount of EITC to which a taxpayer is entitled are based on several factors, including the taxpayer's earned income, filing status, and number of qualifying children, if any.<sup>1</sup>

IRC § 165(i)(5) defines a “federally declared disaster” as any disaster determined by the President to warrant federal assistance under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, and it defines a “disaster area” as any area so determined to warrant federal assistance.

On numerous occasions when the President has declared a disaster, Congress has passed legislation to give affected taxpayers who earn less income in the disaster year than the prior year the option of using their prior year's income to claim EITC benefits. This provision is referred to as the “EITC lookback rule.” Most recently, Congress authorized the EITC lookback rule for tax years 2020 and 2021 to provide relief from the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

In general, the EITC is designed to incentivize work, and its benefits are only available to individuals who have earned income. During major disasters like a pandemic, a hurricane, or a wildfire, many employed taxpayers experience an unexpected disruption in work and a loss of earned income. Where affected taxpayers previously had earned income levels that qualified them for EITC benefits, they may suffer a double financial hit: (i) they may lose the income earned from their jobs and (ii) they may lose their EITC benefits because they are no longer earning income.

<sup>1</sup> IRC § 32.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., American Rescue Plan Act, Pub. L. No. 117-2, § 9626, 135 Stat. 4, 157 (2021); Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-260, Div. EE, Title II, § 211, 134 Stat. 1181, 3066-3067 (2020); Disaster Tax Relief and Airport and Airway Extension Act of 2017, Pub. L. No. 115-63, § 504, 131 Stat. 1168, 1183 (2017); Heartland Disaster Tax Relief of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-343, Div. C, Title VII, Subtitle A, § 701, 122 Stat. 3765, 3912 (2008); Katrina Emergency Tax Relief Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-73, Title IV, § 406, 119 Stat. 2016, 2028 (2005).

The EITC lookback rule is designed to provide relief to taxpayers in this circumstance. To illustrate, assume a taxpayer who is a parent and was consistently employed for several years was laid off when the COVID-19 pandemic struck in early 2020. As a result, the taxpayer did not have sufficient 2020 earned income to qualify for significant EITC benefits but earned sufficient income in the prior year to qualify. The EITC lookback rule provided relief by allowing the taxpayer to qualify for EITC benefits based on their 2019 income.

To date, Congress has authorized use of the EITC lookback rule on a disaster-by-disaster basis. This one-off approach means similarly situated taxpayers are treated differently, where taxpayers affected by some disasters receive relief while taxpayers facing identical challenges from other disasters do not. To ensure a fair and just tax system for all taxpayers affected by federally declared disasters, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommends that Congress amend IRC § 32 to permanently provide the EITC lookback option for all taxpayers who are affected by a federally declared disaster as defined in IRC § 165(i)(5).

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 32 to permanently allow taxpayers who are affected by a federally declared disaster as defined by IRC § 165(i)(5) to elect to use their prior year's earned income to calculate and claim the EITC.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Tax Fairness for Disaster Victims Act, H.R. 2619, 118th Cong. § 2 (2023).

**Legislative Recommendation #54****Allow the Limitation on Theft Loss Deductions in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act to Expire So Scam Victims Are Not Taxed on Amounts Stolen From Them****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The tax code historically has allowed individual taxpayers to deduct theft losses, but for tax years 2018 through 2025 the code has sharply restricted the availability of this deduction. Together with timing constraints on deductions and refund claims, this restriction generally prevents scam victims from offsetting their losses.
- *Solution:* Allow the current theft loss restriction to expire, thereby restoring the pre-2018 rules, and allow taxpayers to claim a theft loss deduction in the year of the related income event by filing an amended return even if they discovered the theft after the refund limitations period.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 165(a) generally authorizes taxpayers to deduct “any loss sustained during the taxable year and not compensated for by insurance or otherwise.” For tax years 2018 through 2025, IRC § 165(h)(5) provides that an individual taxpayer may only claim a casualty and theft loss deduction to the extent the loss is attributable to a federally declared disaster.<sup>1</sup>

Under IRC § 165(c), the limitation of IRC § 165(h)(5) does not apply where an individual taxpayer incurs the loss in a trade or business or in any transaction entered into for profit.<sup>2</sup>

IRC § 165(e) provides that a taxpayer must deduct a theft loss in the year in which the taxpayer discovers the theft.

IRC § 72(t) imposes a ten percent additional tax on early distributions from qualified retirement accounts made before the taxpayer reaches age 59½, with enumerated exceptions.<sup>3</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Before the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA),<sup>4</sup> IRC § 165 allowed individual taxpayers who are victims of theft to deduct their losses from taxable income. The TCJA significantly narrowed this deduction. As a result, many scam victims now face tax bills on money they lost to fraudsters.

While the theft loss deduction is still available for businesses and for individuals who incur losses in transactions entered into for profit under IRC § 165(c), most scam victims do not fall into these categories.

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1 IRC § 165 losses are colloquially referred to as “casualty and theft” losses. Casualty losses include losses attributable to federally declared disasters, which have generally remained deductible under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA). Theft losses incurred by individuals, however, generally may not be deducted under the TCJA. See Pub. L. No. 11597, § 11044, 131 Stat. 2054, 2087 (2017).

2 IRC § 165(c)(1) addresses losses incurred in a trade or business, while IRC § 165(c)(2) addresses losses incurred in any transaction entered into for profit (although not connected with a trade or business).

3 The ten percent amount is legally an additional tax, although it is often referred to as a ten percent “penalty.” Exceptions are enumerated in IRC § 72(t)(2).

4 Pub. L. No. 115-97, § 11044, 131 Stat. 2054, 2087 (2017).

The IRS previously provided relief for Ponzi scheme victims, determining such false investments were entered into for profit,<sup>5</sup> but currently there is no similar protection for victims of other scams.

*Example:* A taxpayer, scammed into withdrawing retirement funds, must pay taxes on the withdrawal, plus a ten percent additional tax if they are not yet 59½ years old.<sup>6</sup> This is the case even though the scammer absconded with the funds and the taxpayer never benefitted from the money withdrawn.

Whether a scam victim can deduct a loss like this often depends on proving a profit motive.<sup>7</sup> This may be plausible for investment scams, but it is nearly impossible for romance, technical support, or scare tactic scams.<sup>8</sup>

Even when a deduction is permitted, existing statute of limitation periods can prevent victims from claiming refunds if they discover the scam too late.<sup>9</sup> In addition, because current law requires the taxpayer to claim the deduction in the year the theft was discovered (not in the year the taxpayer lost the money), a taxpayer who is still within the statute of limitations period for a refund might not have enough income in the later year to deduct the loss fully.<sup>10</sup> This means victims might not be able to deduct all of their losses against the amount stolen from them.<sup>11</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Allow the current provisions of IRC § 165(h)(5) to expire, thereby reinstating the pre-TCJA language so its availability is not limited to losses incurred in federally declared disaster areas.<sup>12</sup>
- Amend the current IRC § 165(e) to enable scam victims to deduct a loss in the same year as any associated income inclusion event.<sup>13</sup>
- Amend IRC § 6511 to extend the limitations period for refund claims related to newly discovered theft losses due to scams.
- Amend IRC § 72(t) to create an exception to the ten percent additional tax on early distributions from qualified plans (e.g., IRC § 401(k), IRA, or other tax-deferred accounts) that were withdrawn because of a scam.

5 Rev. Rul. 2009-9, 2009-14 I.R.B. 735; Rev. Proc. 2009-20, 2009-14 I.R.B. 749, as modified by Rev. Proc. 2011-58, 2011-50 I.R.B. 849. These rulings were issued to provide clarity to victims of a scheme famously perpetrated by Bernard Madoff.

6 IRC § 72(t)(1).

7 For factors to consider in determining whether a taxpayer entered into a transaction for profit, see Treas. Reg. § 1.183-2.

8 For a discussion of tax-related scams, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2024 Annual Report to Congress, <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/AnnualReport2024>.

9 IRC § 6511.

10 IRC § 165(e).

11 Consider an example that illustrates how losses may be limited. Assume a taxpayer with a fixed annual income of \$50,000 is scammed out of \$100,000 from their IRC § 401(k) account in Year One, creating total income in that year of \$150,000. In Year Three, the taxpayer discovers the scam. Under current law, the taxpayer cannot deduct the \$100,000 loss against the Year One income of \$150,000. Instead, the taxpayer must claim the deduction in Year Three against their fixed income of \$50,000. This means there may not be enough income for the taxpayer to net out the \$100,000 theft loss.

12 Congress could choose to make this change retroactive to provide relief to recent scam victims.

13 Congress could give taxpayers the option to claim the loss in the year a statutory change is enacted.

**Legislative Recommendation #55****Amend the Lookback Period for Allowing Tax Credits or Refunds to Include the Period of Any Postponement or Additional or Disregarded Time for Timely Filing a Tax Return****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Taxpayers who file their tax returns by the April 15 filing deadline ordinarily have until April 15 three years later to file a claim for credit or refund of any overpayments of tax. When a filing deadline is postponed due to a federally declared disaster or similar reason, however, the three-year “lookback period” for *paying* refunds is not correspondingly extended. Consequently, some taxpayers who take advantage of postponed filing deadlines cannot obtain refunds even if they timely file their refund claims.
- *Solution:* When a filing deadline is postponed, extend the three-year lookback period in which the IRS may allow claims for credit or refund by the same amount of time.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 6511(a) provides that taxpayers who believe they have overpaid their tax generally may file a claim for credit or refund with the IRS by the later of:

1. Three years from the date the return was filed; or
2. Two years from the date the tax was paid.

IRC § 6511(b) places limits on the amount the IRS may credit or refund by using a two-year or three-year lookback period:

1. Taxpayers who file claims for credit or refund within three years from the date the original return was filed will have their credits or refunds limited to the amounts paid within the three-year period before the filing of the claim, *plus the period of any extension of time for filing the original return* (the “three-year lookback period”). See IRC § 6511(b)(2)(A).
2. Taxpayers who do not file claims for credit or refund within three years from the date the original return was filed will have their credits or refunds limited to the amounts paid within the two-year period immediately preceding the filing of the claim. See IRC § 6511(b)(2)(B).

For calendar year taxpayers, IRC § 6513(b) provides that any tax deducted and withheld on wages and any amounts paid as estimated tax are deemed paid on April 15 in the year following the close of the taxable year for which the paid tax is allowable as a credit.

There are certain circumstances in which filing deadlines may be postponed. For example, under IRC § 7508A, when the Secretary determines that a taxpayer has been affected by a federally declared disaster, the Secretary is authorized to disregard for up to one year certain acts a taxpayer is required to undertake under the IRC, including the filing of a tax return.<sup>1</sup> The time that is disregarded in this context has been described as

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<sup>1</sup> IRC § 7508A(a)(1) also authorizes the Secretary to disregard a period of up to one year when determining whether certain IRS acts are timely.

a “postponement.”<sup>2</sup> The Secretary exercises this authority regularly.<sup>3</sup> For example, the Secretary exercised this authority during the COVID-19 pandemic by disregarding the period from April 15 to July 15 in 2020, and disregarding the period from April 15 to May 17 in 2021 for purposes of timely filing an individual income tax return.<sup>4</sup>

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

In most circumstances, the deadline for taxpayers to file claims for refund or credit under IRC § 6511(a) and the time in which the IRS may issue a refund or credit under IRC § 6511(b) seamlessly align. That is true both when a taxpayer files a return by the regular April 15 filing deadline and when a taxpayer requests an extension of time and files a return by October 15. When a return filing deadline is postponed under IRC § 7508A, however, the three-year lookback period for the IRS to issue a refund or credit is not automatically extended. As a result, a taxpayer who takes advantage of a postponed filing deadline beyond April 15 may not receive a refund or credit if they wait three years to file a claim.

*Example:* In 2019, a taxpayer had income tax withheld from his paycheck every two weeks. The taxpayer filed his 2019 return on the *postponed* filing deadline of July 15, 2020. The taxpayer’s 2019 tax liability was fully paid through withholding, which was deemed paid on April 15, 2020. Based on the return filing date of July 15, 2020, the taxpayer filed a claim for refund on July 14, 2023. Under IRC § 6511(a), the claim for refund was timely, as it was filed within three years from the return filing date. Under the three-year lookback period of IRC § 6511(b), however, the amount of the taxpayer’s refund was limited to payments made in the three years prior to filing the claim (*i.e.*, payments made on or after July 14, 2020). The withholding deemed paid on April 15, 2020, fell outside that period,<sup>5</sup> so the refund amount was limited to \$0, effectively denying the taxpayer any refund.

By contrast, if the taxpayer had requested a filing extension until October 15, 2020, the taxpayer would have had until October 16, 2023, (because October 15, 2023, was a Sunday)<sup>6</sup> to file a claim and receive a full refund, because the lookback period of IRC § 6511(b)(2)(A) includes the extension period.

The IRS remedied this problem for the tax years for which filing deadlines were postponed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The IRS issued Notice 2023-21,<sup>7</sup> under its authority in IRC § 7508A(a), to disregard the period of postponement when determining the beginning of the lookback period for taxpayers who timely filed 2019 or 2020 tax returns pursuant to the postponements. Thus, under this notice, taxpayers were able to file claims for credit or refund within three years of the postponed return due dates without having their credits or refunds barred by the three-year lookback period.

<sup>2</sup> See Treas. Reg. § 301.7508A-1(d)(3).

<sup>3</sup> See IRS, Tax Relief in Disaster Situations (Sept. 13, 2024), <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/tax-relief-in-disaster-situations>.

<sup>4</sup> See IRS Notice 2020-23, 2020-18 I.R.B. 742, Update to Notice 2020-18, Additional Relief for Taxpayers Affected by Ongoing Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-20-23.pdf>; IRS Notice 2021-21, 2021-15 I.R.B. 986, Relief for Form 1040 Filers Affected By Ongoing Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-21-21.pdf>. These notices did not affect the date on which any withheld tax or estimated tax for 2019 or 2020 was deemed paid. See Treas. Reg. § 301.7508A-1(b)(4) (“To the extent that other statutes may rely on the date a return is due to be filed, the postponement period will not change the due date of the return”). Any withheld tax or estimated tax for 2019 was deemed paid on April 15, 2020, for calendar year taxpayers. Similarly, any withheld or estimated tax for 2020 was deemed paid on April 15, 2021, for calendar year taxpayers.

<sup>5</sup> This would be the same for any estimated tax payments.

<sup>6</sup> See IRC § 7503 (when the last day for filing falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday, the act will be timely if performed on the next business day). See also Rev. Rul. 2003-41, 2003-17 C.B. 814 (concluding that when a return is filed on the first business day after a weekend or legal holiday, the lookback period is adjusted accordingly), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-irbs/irb03-17.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> 2023-11 I.R.B. 563, Lookback Periods for Claims for Credit or Refund for Returns with Due Dates Postponed by Notice 2020-23 or Notice 2021-21, [https://www.irs.gov/irb/2023-11\\_IRB](https://www.irs.gov/irb/2023-11_IRB).

Notice 2023-21, however, only fixed the problem for claims for credit or refund for tax years 2019 and 2020 with respect to the COVID-19 postponement. Thus, the outcome in the above example generally persists for taxpayers when the IRS postpones return filing deadlines due to federally declared disasters. We do not believe such an outcome was intended. Because of the large number of federally declared disasters for which the IRS grants relief each year and the millions of taxpayers affected, we recommend that Congress provide a permanent solution to this problem.<sup>8</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6511(b)(2)(A) to provide that when any postponement or addition or disregarding of time is granted pursuant to the IRC for purposes of timely filing, the limit on the amount of a credit or refund will be the amounts paid in the three-year period preceding the filing of a claim for credit or refund, *plus any period of extension, postponement, or additional or disregarded time for timely filing the related return.*

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<sup>8</sup> Other contexts where this could occur include: (1) when additional time is provided under IRC § 7503 if a due date falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday and (2) when time is disregarded under IRC § 7508 while an individual is serving in a combat zone or contingency operation.

**Legislative Recommendation #56****Protect Taxpayers in Federally Declared Disaster Areas Who Receive Filing and Payment Relief From Inaccurate and Confusing Collection Notices****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* When the IRS postpones a filing and payment deadline due to a federally declared disaster, some taxpayers with balances due file their returns before the postponed deadline but wait until the postponed deadline to make payment. That is permissible, yet the law generally requires the IRS to mail a “notice and demand” for payment within 60 days of an assessment, which commonly occurs after the taxpayer files their return. These notices include language about interest and penalties accruing before the postponed due date, causing needless confusion and worry for taxpayers and needless work for the IRS. In 2023, over a million California taxpayers received these confusing notices, as did taxpayers in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee.
- *Solution:* When the IRS postpones a filing and payment deadline, tie the deadline for mailing a notice and demand for payment to the postponed filing deadline if the return is filed prior to the postponed date.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7508A provides that when the Secretary determines a taxpayer has been affected by a federally declared disaster, a significant fire, or a terroristic or military action, the Secretary is authorized to “disregard” for up to one year certain acts the taxpayer and the government are required to undertake under the internal revenue laws, including the filing of a tax return and the payment of tax.<sup>1</sup> The time disregarded in this context has been described as a “postponement.”<sup>2</sup>

IRC § 6303(a) requires the IRS to issue a notice and demand for payment within 60 days of assessment. An assessment generally occurs after a taxpayer files a return showing a tax liability (*i.e.*, the taxpayer self-reports the tax, also known as a “self-assessment”). Under IRC § 6303(b), if an assessment occurs before the last date prescribed for payment of tax, no notice and demand for payment is required until after the last date “prescribed” for payment of tax.<sup>3</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

A period of postponement under IRC § 7508A does not change the due date of the return.<sup>4</sup> Thus, a glitch in the rules arises because a “postponed” payment deadline does not change the “prescribed” payment deadline. It merely allows the IRS to disregard a period of up to one year for performance of the tax-related act.<sup>5</sup> Because the prescribed due date for payment does not change, IRC § 6303 requires the IRS to issue a notice and demand for payment within 60 days of assessment.

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1 IRC § 7508A(a) (citing IRC § 7508(a)(1)).

2 See Treas. Reg. § 301.7508A-1(d)(3).

3 See also IRC § 6151.

4 Treas. Reg. § 301.7508A-1(b)(4).

5 IRC § 7508A(a) (citing IRC § 7508(a)(1)); Treas. Reg. § 301.7508A-1(b)(4).

In 2023, the IRS postponed certain filing and payment deadlines for taxpayers affected by severe weather in almost all of California.<sup>6</sup> Some of these taxpayers filed their returns with a balance due before the postponed deadline but held off on making payments until the postponed deadline.

*Example:* The regular filing deadline of April 15 is postponed until November 15. A taxpayer files a balance due return on June 1 and plans to make payment on the postponed filing deadline of November 15. The assessment of tax occurs on June 1 (by reason of the self-assessed tax on the filed return), and the IRS issues a notice and demand for payment within 60 days (*i.e.*, by July 31). The notice informs the taxpayer that interest and penalties will accrue after the due date reflected on the front page of the notice. The taxpayer is concerned that the accountant's advice about waiting to make a payment until the postponed due date was incorrect and is worried he or she may face IRS collection action. As a result, the taxpayer may pay the tax earlier than legally required (November 15) or may seek additional advice from the accountant and incur additional fees.

The IRS sent over a million of these notice and demand letters to taxpayers in California covered by a disaster relief declaration.<sup>7</sup> It also sent these notices to taxpayers in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee.<sup>8</sup> The IRS included a short paragraph on the back of page four of the notice explaining that the taxpayer may qualify for disaster relief. After receiving complaints from affected taxpayers and tax professionals, the IRS later sent out updated notices to clarify that taxpayers covered by disaster declarations did not have to pay before the postponed due date.<sup>9</sup> But the IRS continued to send out notice and demand letters to taxpayers whose returns showed a balance due because it believes the notice is legally required to protect its ability to later collect any unpaid tax.<sup>10</sup>

Under IRC § 7508A, the Secretary has the legal authority to postpone issuing a notice and demand for payment, but the Secretary has rarely done so.<sup>11</sup> We urge the Secretary to routinely postpone notices and demands for payment when postponing filing and payment deadlines. However, because of the large number of federally declared disasters for which the IRS grants relief each year and the millions of affected taxpayers,<sup>12</sup>

6 See IRS, IRS Announces Tax Relief for Victims of Severe Winter Storms, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides in California, <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-announces-tax-relief-for-victims-of-severe-winter-storms-flooding-landslides-and-mudslides-in-california> (last visited Oct. 8, 2024). Seven other states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee) faced a similar issue with incorrect notice and demand letters. See Erin M. Collins, Disaster Relief: What the IRS giveth, the IRS taketh away. Or so it seems for disaster relief taxpayers until you get to page 4 of the collection notice (Part One), NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE BLOG (July 11, 2023), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog-cp-14-collection-notice-part-one>; IRS News Release, IR-2023-121, IRS Sends Special Mailing to Taxpayers in Certain Disaster Areas (June 28, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-sends-special-mailing-to-taxpayers-in-certain-disaster-areas>.

7 Natalie Campisi, *IRS Collection Notices Go Out To 1 Million Taxpayers By Mistake; Disaster-Related Extensions Still Apply*, FORBES, July 14, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/taxes/california-disaster-tax-relief>.

8 See Erin M. Collins, Disaster Relief: What the IRS giveth, the IRS taketh away. Or so it seems for disaster relief taxpayers until you get to page 4 of the collection notice (Part One), NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE BLOG (July 11, 2023), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog-cp-14-collection-notice-part-one>.

9 See Erin M. Collins, Disaster Relief: What the IRS giveth, the IRS taketh away. Or so it seems for disaster relief taxpayers until you get to page 4 of the collection notice. (Part One), NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE BLOG (July 11, 2023), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog-cp-14-collection-notice-part-one>; Erin M. Collins, Disaster Relief: What the IRS giveth, the IRS taketh away. Or so it seems for disaster relief taxpayers until you get to page 4 of the collection notice. (Part Two), NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE BLOG (July 12, 2023), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog-cp-14-collection-notice-part-two/>. See also IRS, IRS Statement on California Mailing of Balance Due Notices (June 30, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-statement-on-california-mailing-of-balance-due-notices>.

10 In 2024, the IRS introduced a disaster coversheet to accompany the notice and demand letters. The package now includes the notice and demand with the non-postponed due date and the coversheet with the postponed due date. Although this added coversheet is an improvement, the conflicting information still creates the risk of taxpayer confusion.

11 Treas. Reg. § 301.7508A-1(c)(2)(ii). See, e.g., IRS Notice 2023-71, 2023-44 I.R.B. 1191, Relief for Taxpayers Affected by the Terroristic Action in the State of Israel, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-23-71.pdf>; IRS Notice 2020-23, 2020-18 I.R.B. 742, Update to Notice 2020-18, Additional Relief for Taxpayers Affected by Ongoing Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-20-23.pdf>.

12 See IRS, Tax Relief in Disaster Situations, <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/tax-relief-in-disaster-situations> (last visited Oct. 8, 2024).

we recommend that Congress pass legislation to provide a permanent solution to this problem so that case-by-case exceptions are not required. The proposed recommendation would keep the IRS from mailing notices that lead to taxpayer confusion and anxiety.

**RECOMMENDATION**

- Amend IRC § 6303(b) to include postponement periods when determining the last date prescribed for payment of tax.

**Legislative Recommendation #57****Allow Taxpayers in Limited Circumstances to Claim the Child Tax Credit With Respect to Children Who Do Not Have Social Security Numbers But Otherwise Qualify for the Credit****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* In 2017, Congress enacted legislation that prohibits taxpayers from claiming a child for purposes of the child tax credit (CTC) if the child does not have a Social Security number (SSN). This restriction was not intended to exclude children who are U.S. citizens. However, there are at least three categories of children who are U.S. citizens but do not have SSNs. The change in law has had the unintended effect of preventing families from receiving CTC benefits with respect to these children.
- *Solution:* Allow children who are U.S. citizens and do not have SSNs to be claimed for purposes of the CTC in the limited circumstances described below, provided they meet all other eligibility requirements.

**PRESENT LAW**

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) amended IRC § 24(h)(7) to require a taxpayer claiming the CTC to provide an SSN valid for employment for a qualifying child.<sup>1</sup>

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

The requirement under IRC § 24(h)(7) that a qualifying child claimed for the CTC have an SSN valid for employment was intended to prevent a taxpayer whose child is not a U.S. citizen or is not otherwise eligible for an SSN from receiving the CTC. However, the provision is having the unintended effect of disqualifying several taxpayer populations whose dependents are U.S. citizens who lack SSNs due to unique circumstances but otherwise meet the requirements for the credit. Taxpayer populations whose children are U.S. citizens but do not have SSNs include the following:

- Taxpayers who do not apply for SSNs due to deeply held religious beliefs, most notably the Amish;<sup>2</sup>
- Taxpayers whose adopted children have not yet received SSNs; and
- Taxpayers who are unable to obtain an SSN for a qualifying child because the child was born and died in the same or consecutive tax years (*i.e.*, before the Social Security Administration issued an SSN for the child).

<sup>1</sup> TCJA, Pub. L. No. 115-97, § 11022(a), 131 Stat. 2054, 2073-2074 (2017) (codified at IRC § 24(h)(7)).

<sup>2</sup> IRC § 1402(g) provides an exemption from the requirement to pay self-employment tax for an individual who “is a member of a recognized religious sect or division thereof and is an adherent of established religious tenets or teachings of such sect or division by reason of which he is conscientiously opposed to acceptance” of Social Security benefits, Medicare, or other insurance plans. Because SSNs are used to keep track of Social Security taxes and benefits, some of these individuals are also conscientiously opposed to obtaining SSNs. To claim the exemption, an individual must apply on IRS Form 4029, Application for Exemption From Social Security and Medicare Taxes and Waiver of Benefits. For purposes of the Child Tax Credit, taxpayers whose qualifying children did not have an SSN or other TIN due to the taxpayers’ deeply held religious beliefs were allowed the credit, prior to enactment of the TCJA, if the taxpayers indicated on their tax returns that they have an approved Form 4029 establishing that they had met the requirements under IRC § 1402(g).

*Taxpayers who do not apply for SSNs due to deeply held religious beliefs.* Prior to the TCJA amendment, IRC § 24 only required a taxpayer claiming a child for purposes of the CTC to provide a taxpayer identification number (TIN) for the child.<sup>3</sup> The TIN did not have to be an SSN. In addition, the IRS provided administrative relief to allow the credit to a taxpayer without a TIN for a qualifying child due to the taxpayer's deeply held religious beliefs. The fact that taxpayers with religious-based reasons for not obtaining SSNs for their children are now barred by the TCJA from receiving the CTC not only denies them a valuable tax benefit but may also constitute a violation of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.<sup>4</sup>

*Taxpayers whose adopted children have not yet received SSNs.* The CTC language prior to the TCJA change permitted the IRS to allow the credit for taxpayers whose children had Adoption Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ATINs), which are TINs issued by the IRS for use while waiting to receive SSNs for adopted children. Since the passage of the TCJA, the IRS is no longer providing administrative relief to allow the CTC with respect to children with ATINs.

*Taxpayers who are unable to obtain an SSN for a qualifying child because the child was born and died in the same or consecutive tax years.* The TCJA requires taxpayers to provide an SSN for a qualifying child to claim the CTC with respect to children who are born and die in the same or consecutive tax years, but the IRS currently is making an administrative exception to this requirement. While we are pleased this category of taxpayers is receiving relief, it is unclear on what basis the IRS has the legal authority to create an administrative exception to the statutory SSN requirement for this category of affected taxpayers but not for others.

The National Taxpayer Advocate believes these taxpayer populations are being treated unjustly because the TCJA language did not provide an exception to the SSN requirement for qualifying children in these specific groups, thereby denying them the CTC to which they are otherwise entitled. Moreover, the IRS is now applying the law inconsistently by allowing an exception for children who were born and died in the same or consecutive tax years while not allowing an exception for similar categories of children – namely, children who do not have an SSN due to their parents' deeply held religious beliefs and children who were adopted and have an ATIN for the year for which the tax credit is being claimed.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 24(h)(7) to allow a taxpayer to claim the CTC with respect to a qualifying child without an SSN if the taxpayer meets all other eligibility requirements for the credit and if the taxpayer:
  - Has a sincere and deeply held religious belief that prohibits them from obtaining an SSN;
  - Adopted a child (or has a child placed with the taxpayer for legal adoption by an authorized placement agency) and provides an ATIN for the child; or
  - Had a child who was born and who died in the same or consecutive tax years.

3 A TIN is an identification number used by the IRS in administering the tax laws. It includes an SSN but also includes an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), an Adoption Taxpayer Identification Number (ATIN), and other identifying numbers.

4 See *The Tax Filing Season: Hearing Before the H. Subcomm. on Gov't Oversight of the H. Comm. on Ways and Means*, 116th Cong. 22-27 (2019) (testimony of Nina E. Olson, then the National Taxpayer Advocate); National Taxpayer Advocate Fiscal Year 2020 Objectives Report to Congress 48 (Area of Focus: *TAS Will Urge the IRS to Reconsider Its Position on the Application of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to the Social Security Requirement Under IRC § 24(h)(7), Which Has the Effect of Denying Child Tax Credit Benefits to the Amish and Certain Other Religious Groups*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/JRC20\\_Volume1\\_AOF\\_02.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/JRC20_Volume1_AOF_02.pdf).

**Legislative Recommendation #58****Clarify Whether Dependents Are Required to Have Taxpayer Identification Numbers for Purposes of the Credit for Other Dependents****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* As part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), Congress authorized taxpayers to claim a tax credit for dependents who do not meet the requirements of a qualifying child. In doing so, Congress did not require that the dependents have taxpayer identification numbers (TINs), but the IRS has imposed this requirement. This IRS-imposed requirement has rendered hundreds of thousands of otherwise qualifying dependents ineligible for credit claims.
- *Solution:* Clarify whether a dependent is required to have a TIN for purposes of the Credit for Other Dependents (ODC).

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 24 authorizes a Child Tax Credit (CTC) of up to \$2,000 per qualifying child, of which up to \$1,400 is refundable.<sup>1</sup> The TCJA added a new provision to IRC § 24 that allows a nonrefundable credit of \$500 for each dependent who is not a qualifying child.<sup>2</sup> This nonrefundable credit is found in IRC § 24(h)(4) and referred to as the ODC.

IRC § 24(e) provides that a qualifying child must have a TIN. IRC § 24(h)(7) provides that, through 2025, the qualifying child's TIN must be a Social Security number (SSN) valid for employment in the United States.

Under IRC § 24(h)(4), the ODC is available for a “dependent of the taxpayer (as defined in section 152).” There is no requirement in IRC § 152 that an individual have a TIN (either an SSN or an individual taxpayer identification number) to be a dependent. IRC § 24(h)(4)(C) specifically provides that if a qualifying child's lack of an SSN prevents a taxpayer from claiming the CTC for that child, the taxpayer may receive the ODC for that child.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Despite the absence of a TIN requirement in the statute, the IRS has taken the position that a dependent must have a TIN to be claimed for purposes of the ODC.<sup>3</sup> The IRS has used its summary assessment

1 For tax year 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act made this credit fully refundable and increased the credit to \$3,000 for children under 18 and to \$3,600 for children under six. Pub. L. No. 117-2, § 9611, 135 Stat. 4, 144-145 (2021).

2 Pub. L. No. 115-97, § 11022, 131 Stat. 2054, 2073 (2017) (applicable to taxable years beginning after Dec. 31, 2017, and before Jan. 1, 2026).

3 See, e.g., IRS, Form 1040 (and 1040-SR) Instructions 18-19 (Dec. 27, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1040qi.pdf>; IRS, 2023 Instructions for Schedule 8812, at 1 (Dec. 6, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1040s8.pdf>.

authority to disallow the ODC claimed by nearly 390,000 taxpayers on their returns from Tax Years 2018 to 2023 (as of October 2024) because their dependents did not have TINs.<sup>4</sup>

In response to an inquiry from TAS, the IRS Office of Chief Counsel explained its legal rationale as follows:

[I]n order to avoid treating dependents for whom a taxpayer may claim a credit under section 24(h)(4)(A) [i.e., the ODC] inconsistently, section 24(e)(1) [which imposes a TIN requirement for claiming a “qualifying child” for a credit under section 24] should be interpreted as applying to all dependents for whom a taxpayer claims a credit under section 24(h)(4)(A), not only a qualifying child described in section 24(h)(4)(C) [i.e., a “qualifying child” who lacks the SSN required by section 24(h)(7)].<sup>5</sup>

We question whether the IRS may legally impose a TIN requirement for the ODC. It is a basic principle of statutory interpretation that the unambiguous language of a statute controls.<sup>6</sup> Here, there is no statutory requirement that a dependent have a TIN to be claimed for the ODC. The IRS has imposed the requirement on its own.

The TCJA legislative history shows that Congress considered a TIN requirement and did not adopt it. The House version of the TCJA included a requirement that a dependent have a TIN for purposes of the ODC, but the subsequent Senate version of the TCJA did not. The enacted bill followed the Senate approach.<sup>7</sup>

To resolve the inconsistency between the absence of a TIN requirement in the ODC statute and the IRS’s decision to impose the requirement on its own, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommends that Congress clarify its intent.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Clarify whether a dependent is required to have a TIN for purposes of the ODC under IRC § 24(h)(4).

4 We presume the IRS exercised its summary assessment authority in reliance on IRC § 6213(g)(2)(I), which defines “mathematical or clerical error” to include “an omission of a correct TIN required under section 24(e) (relating to child tax credit) to be included on a return.” The nearly 390,000 taxpayers include both primary and secondary taxpayers on married filing joint returns and correspond to 269,795 tax returns. IRS, Compliance Data Warehouse, Individual Returns Transaction File, TY 2018-2023 (Oct. 2024). If \$500 of ODC was claimed with respect to each dependent, then the total amount of disallowed ODC would be about \$287 million (i.e., 574,550 multiplied by \$500).

5 Email from the Office of Division Counsel/Associate Chief Counsel (National Taxpayer Advocate Program) to TAS Management & Program Analyst (Dec. 19, 2019) (on file with TAS). The email does not contain references or citations to any legal authority for this position.

6 See, e.g., *Babb v. Wilkie*, 589 U.S. 399, 413 (2020) (“In any event, where, as here, the words of [a] statute are unambiguous, the judicial inquiry is complete.”) (internal quotations omitted); *Connecticut Nat’l Bank v. Germain*, 503 U.S. 249, 253-54 (1992) (“We have stated time and again that courts must presume that a legislature says in a statute what it means and means in a statute what it says there.”).

7 See H.R. REP. NO. 115-466, at 225-227 (2017) (Conf. Rep.), <https://www.congress.gov/115/crpt/hrpt466/CRPT-115hrpt466.pdf>. It is possible that a drafting error was made, but if so, Congress – not the IRS – should correct it. Indeed, a technical correction was proposed but was not enacted. See STAFF OF J. COMM. ON TAX’N, 115TH CONG., TECH. EXPLANATION OF THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMM. CHAIRMAN’S DISCUSSION DRAFT OF THE “TAX TECH. AND CLERICAL CORR. ACT” 4, JCX-1-19 (J. Comm. Print 2019), <https://www.ict.gov/publications.html?func=startdown&id=5154>.

**Legislative Recommendation #59****Allow Members of Certain Religious Sects That Do Not Participate in Social Security and Medicare to Obtain Employment Tax Refunds****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Members of certain religious sects, most notably the Amish, do not accept Social Security or Medicare benefits, and the law consequently exempts them from the requirement to pay Social Security and Medicare taxes if their employers are members of the same religious sect. However, the exemption does not apply if they work for employers who are *not* members of the same religious sect. These conflicting outcomes burden individuals who work for non-sect employers, as they are required to pay Social Security and Medicare taxes for benefits they will neither claim nor receive.
- *Solution:* Allow members of recognized religious sects who work for employers who are not members of such sects to claim a refund or credit for employment taxes paid.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 3101 imposes a tax on wages paid to employees to fund old-age, survivors, and disability insurance (Social Security) and hospital insurance (Medicare) pursuant to the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA).<sup>1</sup> IRC § 3111 requires employers to pay FICA tax at the same rate on their employees' wages.<sup>2</sup>

IRC § 1401 imposes a comparable tax on self-employed individuals pursuant to the Self-Employment Contributions Act (SECA). This tax is paid in full by the self-employed individual.

Members of the Amish community sought exclusions from these taxes because the tenets of their religion prohibit them from accepting social insurance benefits. In response, Congress enacted IRC § 1402(g), which exempts self-employed individuals who are members of certain religious faiths from the requirement to pay SECA tax. An individual may apply for an exemption from SECA tax by filing IRS Form 4029, Application for Exemption From Social Security and Medicare Taxes and Waiver of Benefits,

... if he is a member of a recognized religious sect or division thereof and is an adherent of established tenets or teachings of such sect or division by reason of which he is conscientiously opposed to acceptance of the benefits of any private or public insurance which makes payments in the event of death, disability, old-age, or retirement or makes payments toward the cost of, or provides services for, medical care (including the benefits of any insurance system established by the Social Security Act).<sup>3</sup>

Congress subsequently enacted IRC § 3127 to exempt employers from paying their portion of FICA tax under IRC § 3111, provided that both the employer and the employee are members of the same recognized religious sect, both the employer and the employee are adherents of established tenets or teachings of the sect,

<sup>1</sup> Under IRC § 3101, a tax of 6.2 percent is imposed on employee wages to fund old-age, survivors and disability insurance, and a tax of 1.45 percent is imposed to fund hospital insurance. In certain circumstances, employee wages are subject to an additional 0.9 percent tax to further fund hospital insurance (Additional Medicare Tax). Employers are generally required to withhold FICA taxes from their employees' wages under IRC § 3102(a).

<sup>2</sup> Because IRC § 3111 imposes an excise tax on the employer at the same rate with respect to the employee's wages, it is commonly understood that FICA tax is paid half by the employer and half by the employee.

<sup>3</sup> IRC § 1401(g)(1).

and both the employer and employee file and receive approval for exemption from their respective portions of FICA tax.<sup>4</sup> The employer and employee must each receive approval by filing IRS Form 4029.<sup>5</sup>

IRC § 6413(b) requires the IRS to refund any overpayment of a taxpayer's FICA tax.

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

The exemptions under IRC §§ 1402(g) and 3127 do not extend to members of recognized religious sects who work for employers who are not members of the same or any religious sect. Members of these sects therefore are paying for Social Security and Medicare benefits that their religious beliefs prohibit them from accepting. The National Taxpayer Advocate believes this result is inequitable and is inconsistent with the taxpayer's *right to a fair and just tax system*. The rationale for exempting self-employed Amish workers and Amish employees of Amish employers, as the law currently provides, applies equally to Amish employees who work for non-Amish employers.<sup>6</sup>

This inequity can be resolved by amending IRC § 6413 to allow employees who are members of a recognized religious group and work for an employer who is not a member of the same recognized religious group to file a refund claim for their portion of remitted FICA tax. Amish leaders have expressed a preference for allowing Amish employees of non-Amish employers to recover the employee's portion of the FICA tax through a refund claim, rather than by exempting the employee from paying the FICA tax, to avoid imposing an additional recordkeeping burden on employers and thereby potentially deterring employers from hiring them.<sup>7</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6413 to allow employees who meet the definition of “a member of a recognized religious sect or division thereof” in IRC § 1402(g) to claim a credit or refund of the employee's portion of FICA taxes withheld from their wages.<sup>8</sup>

4 IRC § 3127 establishes the requirements for employers and employees who are members and adherents of the same recognized religious sect to be exempt from their respective FICA tax obligations as required under IRC §§ 3101 and 3111. If the employer is a partnership, all partners of that partnership must be members of and adhere to the tenets of the same recognized religious sect. All partners of the partnership must apply and be approved individually for the exemption. Treas. Reg. § 31.3127-1(a).

5 For more information regarding the Form 4029 exemption application for members of recognized religious sects, see IRS, Pub. 517, Social Security and Other Information for Members of the Clergy and Religious Workers (Dec. 4, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p517.pdf>.

6 IRC § 1402(g). The discussion in this legislative recommendation applies to any member of a recognized religious sect or division thereof as described in this provision. Historically, the Amish and Mennonites have been the religious groups that have utilized this provision.

7 Meeting between TAS and Amish leaders (Aug. 16, 2019). If this recommendation is enacted, an employer who is not a qualifying member of a recognized religious sect would remain liable for his or her portion of the FICA tax pursuant to IRC § 3111.

8 For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Religious Exemptions for Social Security and Healthcare Taxes Act, H.R. 6183, 117th Cong. § 2 (2021).

**Legislative Recommendation #60****Remove the Requirement That Written Receipts Acknowledging Charitable Contributions Must Be “Contemporaneous”****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* To claim certain types of charitable contributions, a taxpayer must obtain a contemporaneous written acknowledgment from the donee organization within a short time after making the contribution. Taxpayers who do not obtain a written acknowledgment by the deadline are not eligible for the deduction, even if they made the contribution and can otherwise substantiate it.
- *Solution:* Eliminate the requirement that the written acknowledgment must be “contemporaneous.”

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 170(a) authorizes deductions for charitable contributions made during a taxable year. To claim a deduction of \$250 or more, however, a taxpayer must substantiate the contribution with a “contemporaneous written acknowledgment” from the donee organization, as required by IRC § 170(f)(8)(A). To be “contemporaneous,” IRC § 170(f)(8)(C) requires that the acknowledgment be received on or before the earlier of the date on which the tax return is filed or the date on which the tax return is due (including extensions). If the acknowledgment is sent late or if a timely but defective acknowledgment is not supplemented with needed information until after the deadline, the taxpayer is not eligible for the deduction, regardless of whether the taxpayer otherwise qualifies for it.<sup>1</sup>

Under IRC § 170(f)(8)(B), the acknowledgment must include the following information:

- (i) The amount of cash and a description (but not value) of any property other than cash contributed.
- (ii) Whether the donee organization provided any goods or services in consideration, in whole or in part, for any property described in clause (i).
- (iii) A description and good-faith estimate of the value of any goods or services referred to in clause (ii) or, if such goods or services consist solely of intangible religious benefits, a statement to that effect.

“Contemporaneous” timing requirements are also found in IRC § 170(f)(12) relating to contributions of vehicles and IRC § 170(f)(18) relating to contributions to donor-advised funds.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Strict contemporaneous timing requirements harm taxpayers and tax-exempt organizations that make a technical mistake in their written acknowledgments or that provide some required or corrected information after the statutory deadline has passed.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *Albrecht v. Comm’r*, T.C. Memo. 2022-53, n.4 (where a timely obtained written acknowledgment was found insufficient to meet the content requirements for substantiation under IRC § 170(f)(8)(B), the court could not consider additional documentation that supplied the missing information because the donee organization provided it after the contemporaneous recordkeeping deadline).

*Example:* Assume a taxpayer contributes over \$250 to a school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA). They receive an acknowledgment letter from the PTA thanking them for the donation and stating the contribution amount, but the letter fails to state that no goods or services were provided in consideration for the donation. The taxpayer notices the omission of this language as they are preparing their tax return and asks the PTA to send them a corrected acknowledgement. If the corrected acknowledgement is provided even one day after the taxpayer files their return, they will be ineligible for the deduction. If they were to contest this outcome in the Tax Court, the judge would not have the discretion to allow the deduction, even if the evidence conclusively showed the contribution was made and no goods or services were provided in exchange.<sup>2</sup>

In another context, Congress has acknowledged that a “contemporaneous” recordkeeping requirement was overly burdensome on taxpayers. In 1984, Congress added a contemporaneous recordkeeping requirement in IRC § 274(d) (requiring contemporaneous substantiation of certain expenses, including the business use of vehicles) due to concern about significant overstatements of deductions. Yet by 1985, it concluded the contemporaneous recordkeeping requirement “sweeps too broadly and generally imposes excessive recordkeeping burdens on many taxpayers.”<sup>3</sup> Congress repealed the “contemporaneous” requirement while retaining the rules governing the content of the information that must be substantiated.<sup>4</sup> IRC § 274(d) now requires a taxpayer to substantiate a claimed expense by adequate records or by sufficient evidence corroborating the taxpayer’s own statement establishing the amount, time, place, and business purpose of the expense.

Under similar reasoning, removing the “contemporaneous” component of the written acknowledgment requirements in IRC § 170 would still require taxpayers to provide sufficient evidence to substantiate their deductions, but it would reduce taxpayer burden and give the IRS and the courts common-sense flexibility in administering the law.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Remove the “contemporaneous” component of the written acknowledgment requirements in IRC § 170(f)(8), (f)(12), and (f)(18).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., *Durden v. Comm’r*, T.C. Memo. 2012-140.

<sup>3</sup> S. REP. NO. 99-23, at 3 (1985); H.R. REP. NO. 99-34, at 4 (1985).

<sup>4</sup> Pub. L. No. 99-44, § 1, 99 Stat. 77 (1985).

<sup>5</sup> Conforming changes may be required in IRC §§ 2522 and 6720.

**Legislative Recommendation #61****Establish a Uniform Standard Mileage Deduction Rate for All Purposes****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The IRC authorizes taxpayers to deduct the costs of operating an automobile for several purposes. In combination with administrative guidance, however, it authorizes different standard mileage rates for each purpose. This is complicated and confusing for taxpayers, tax professionals, and IRS employees alike.
- *Solution:* Establish a uniform mileage deduction rate for all purposes.

**PRESENT LAW**

There are currently three different standard mileage deduction rates: one for business miles, one for charitable miles, and a third for medical transportation and military relocation miles. The rate for charitable miles is fixed by the IRC. The mileage rates for other purposes are not fixed by the IRC. Instead, the IRS generally adjusts the mileage rates annually.<sup>1</sup> Revenue Procedure 2019-46 states that the IRS will adjust the mileage rates in an annual notice.<sup>2</sup>

- *Business Miles:* IRC § 162 authorizes a deduction for the ordinary and necessary expenses a taxpayer pays or incurs during the taxable year, including the costs of operating an automobile used in the business. In 2024, the mileage deduction for business purposes was 67 cents per mile.<sup>3</sup>
- *Charitable Miles:* IRC § 170 authorizes a deduction for the use of an automobile in providing free services to a charitable organization. IRC § 170(i) sets the mileage deduction for providing free services to a charitable organization at 14 cents per mile. This amount was set in 1998, was not indexed for inflation, and has not been changed since that time.<sup>4</sup>
- *Medical and Military Moving Miles:* Deductions for the costs of operating an automobile are currently permitted for transport to medical care (see IRC § 213) and for military moving purposes (see IRC § 217). In 2024, the standard mileage rate for these purposes was 21 cents per mile.<sup>5</sup>

The IRS sets the standard mileage rate for business purposes by adding the fixed and variable costs of operating a motor vehicle. It sets the standard mileage rate for medical transportation and military relocation automobile expenses based solely on variable costs. Taxpayers have the option to calculate the actual costs of operating a vehicle in lieu of claiming the standard mileage allowance.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See IRC § 62; Treas. Reg. §§ 1.62-2, 1.274-5.

<sup>2</sup> 2019-49 I.R.B. 1301, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/rp-19-46.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> IRS News Release, IR-2023-239, IRS Issues Standard Mileage Rates for 2024; Mileage Rate Increases to 67 Cents a Mile, Up 1.5 Cents From 2023 (Dec. 14, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-issues-standard-mileage-rates-for-2024-mileage-rate-increases-to-67-cents-a-mile-up-1-point-5-cents-from-2023>.

<sup>4</sup> IRC § 170(i); Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, Pub. L. No. 105-34, § 973, 111 Stat. 788, 898 (1997).

<sup>5</sup> IRS News Release, IR-2023-239, IRS Issues Standard Mileage Rates for 2024; Mileage Rate Increases to 67 Cents a Mile, Up 1.5 Cents From 2023 (Dec. 14, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-issues-standard-mileage-rates-for-2024-mileage-rate-increases-to-67-cents-a-mile-up-1-point-5-cents-from-2023>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

The costs of operating a motor vehicle are the same regardless of whether the vehicle is used for business, charitable, medical, or military moving purposes. The use of three different rates causes confusion for taxpayers, tax professionals, and IRS employees. For example, someone may know the deduction rate for one purpose and, not realizing there are different rates, erroneously apply that rate for another purpose. Indeed, some civic minded self-employed individuals may claim mileage deductions for both business and charitable purposes on the same tax return. Not only do multiple rates cause confusion, but if a taxpayer uses the wrong rate, even inadvertently, he or she may be subject to a tax adjustment, penalties, and interest charges. This undermines public confidence in the fairness of the tax system. If a motor vehicle on average costs a certain amount to operate, that mileage rate should apply across the board.

Additionally, the National Taxpayer Advocate notes that the 14-cent standard mileage rate for charitable miles established in 1998 does not reflect the current costs of automobile usage. Mileage rates should be indexed for inflation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a uniform standard mileage deduction rate for business, charitable, medical, and military moving expenses, harmonizing IRC §§ 162, 170(i), 213, and 217.<sup>7</sup>
- Index the standard mileage deduction rate for inflation.

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<sup>7</sup> Under current law, taxpayers claiming a deduction at the standard business mileage rate must reduce the basis of their vehicle by the amount attributable to depreciation. See IRC § 1016(a)(2); Rev. Proc. 2019-46, 2019-49 I.R.B. 1301, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/rp-19-46.pdf>. Similar basis reductions are not required for deductions relating to the use of a vehicle for charitable, medical, or military moving purposes. If Congress establishes a uniform mileage rate, it may wish to consider whether any corresponding changes to the basis adjustment rules would be appropriate.

**Legislative Recommendation #62****Eliminate the Marriage Penalty for Nonresident Aliens Who Otherwise Qualify for the Premium Tax Credit****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Nonresident aliens who are lawfully present in the United States are eligible to receive the Premium Tax Credit (PTC) to subsidize the cost of health insurance. Due to a possible glitch in drafting the law, however, a lawfully present nonresident alien who is married to another nonresident alien is barred from receiving the PTC. This creates a “marriage penalty” that may prevent affected persons from obtaining health insurance, thereby undermining the purpose of the PTC.
- *Solution:* Revise the PTC eligibility requirements to remove the marriage penalty for nonresident aliens who are lawfully present in the United States.

**PRESENT LAW**

To be eligible to enroll in health coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace, an individual must live in the United States; be a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or lawfully present person;<sup>1</sup> and not be incarcerated.<sup>2</sup>

IRC § 36B authorizes the PTC, a refundable credit that subsidizes the cost of eligible individuals’ and families’ premiums for health insurance purchased through the Marketplace. Eligibility for the PTC depends on several factors, including household income based on family size; eligibility for affordable coverage through an employer-sponsored plan that provides minimum value; and eligibility to enroll in government-provided health coverage like Medicare, Medicaid, or TRICARE.

IRC § 36B(c)(1)(C) provides that if a taxpayer is married at the close of the taxable year, the taxpayer may only claim the PTC if the taxpayer and the taxpayer’s spouse file a joint return for that year.<sup>3</sup> IRC § 6013(a)(1) prohibits married taxpayers from filing a joint return if either spouse is a nonresident alien at any time during the taxable year. Under IRC § 6013(g) or (h), a nonresident alien who is married to a U.S. citizen or resident can choose to be treated as a resident for the entire year, which allows the filing of a joint return. If both spouses are nonresident aliens at the end of the year, however, no provision allows them to file a joint return, therefore barring them from receiving the PTC.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

The interaction of the above rules leads to an anomalous result that probably was not intended. Nonresident aliens who are lawfully present in the United States may be eligible for the PTC health insurance subsidy, except if they are married to another nonresident alien – a severe and unwarranted “marriage penalty.” Taxpayers whose income levels qualify them for the PTC but cannot receive it are far less likely to be covered by health insurance, reducing their access to medical care and placing a greater burden on the U.S. healthcare system.

**RECOMMENDATION**

- Amend IRC § 36B(c)(1)(C) to eliminate the joint filing requirement for a nonresident alien who is married to another nonresident alien at the end of the taxable year.

1 For a list of the immigration statuses that are considered “lawfully present,” see *Immigration Status to Qualify for the Marketplace*, HEALTHCARE.GOV, <https://www.healthcare.gov/immigrants/immigration-status/> (last visited Oct. 9, 2024).

2 42 U.S.C. § 18032(f)(1)(B), (3).

3 Exceptions apply for victims of domestic abuse and spousal abandonment. See Treas. Reg. § 1.36B-2(b)(2)(ii); IRC § 7703(b).

**Legislative Recommendation #63****Encourage and Authorize Independent Contractors and Service Recipients to Enter Into Voluntary Withholding Agreements****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Independent contractors are not subject to wage withholding. Instead, they are required to pay their taxes on their own. Many do not. If the IRS audits them or otherwise detects their noncompliance, they become liable for unpaid tax, penalties, and interest charges. If the IRS does not detect their noncompliance, federal revenue collection is impaired.
- *Solution:* Encourage independent contractors and businesses to enter into voluntary withholding agreements.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC Chapter 24, Collection of Income Tax at Source on Wages, provides for required withholding of taxes on wages paid to employees, certain gambling winnings, some pensions and annuities, amounts subject to backup withholding, and certain other payments. In addition, IRC § 3402(p) provides for voluntary withholding at the option of the income recipient on certain payments such as Social Security benefits, unemployment benefits, and other benefits.<sup>1</sup> IRC § 3402(p)(3) authorizes the Secretary to promulgate regulations to provide for withholding from any payment that does not constitute wages if the Secretary finds withholding would be appropriate and the payor and recipient of the payment agree to such withholding.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Secretary may issue guidance by publication in the Internal Revenue Bulletin describing payments for which withholding under a voluntary agreement would be appropriate,<sup>3</sup> the only such guidance issued to date is Notice 2013-77, dealing with dividends and other distributions by Alaska Native Corporations.<sup>4</sup>

IRC § 6654(a) generally imposes a penalty for failure to pay sufficient estimated tax during the year, computed by applying (i) the underpayment rate established under IRC § 6621, (ii) to the underpayment, (iii) for the period of the underpayment.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Unlike employees, whose wage payments are subject to federal income tax withholding, independent contractors are generally responsible for paying their own income taxes. Independent contractors generally must make four estimated tax payments during the year. However, many independent contractors fail to make estimated tax payments for a variety of reasons and therefore face penalties under IRC § 6654. In addition,

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<sup>1</sup> IRC § 3402(p)(1)(C), (p)(2).

<sup>2</sup> IRC § 3402(p)(3) authorizes the promulgation of regulations for withholding from (i) an employee's remuneration for services that do not constitute wages and (ii) any other agreed-upon source that the Secretary finds appropriate. The Secretary must find the withholding would be appropriate "under the provisions of [IRC Chapter 24, Collection of Income Tax at Source on Wages]." Payments made when a voluntary withholding agreement is in effect are treated as if they are wages paid by an employer to an employee for purposes of the income tax withholding provisions and related procedural provisions of subtitle F of the IRC.

<sup>3</sup> See Treas. Reg. § 31.3402(p)-1(c).

<sup>4</sup> IRS Notice 2013-77, 2013-50 I.R.B. 632, Voluntary Withholding on Dividends and Other Distributions by Alaska Native Corporations, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-13-77.pdf>.

some do not save enough money to pay their taxes at the end of the year. As a result, they face additional penalties and interest charges, and they may face IRS collection action, including liens and levies.

The absence of withholding on payments to independent contractors also has a negative impact on revenue collection. IRS National Research Program studies show that tax compliance is substantially lower among workers whose income taxes are not withheld.<sup>5</sup>

This problem may be increasing as more people are working in the so-called “gig economy.” It is projected that by 2028 there will be about 90 million U.S. workers participating in the gig economy.<sup>6</sup> To reduce the risk they will not save enough money to pay their taxes, some independent contractors would prefer to have taxes withheld throughout the year, as they are for employees. There is a legitimate debate about the circumstances under which withholding should be required. However, the National Taxpayer Advocate believes the law should encourage workers and businesses to enter into voluntary withholding agreements when both parties wish to do so.

For many businesses, withholding on payments to independent contractors will not impose an additional burden. In addition to paying independent contractors, most large companies have full-time employees, such as administrative staff, so they already have procedures in place to withhold. The National Taxpayer Advocate understands some businesses may be reluctant to withhold due to concerns that the IRS may cite the existence of withholding agreements to challenge underlying worker classification arrangements. Although the existence of a withholding agreement is generally not a factor the IRS considers when determining whether a worker should be classified as an employee or independent contractor, clarifying this point in the law will provide both businesses and independent contractors with reassurance that entering into a voluntary withholding agreement will not affect worker classification.<sup>7</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 3402(p) to clarify that when voluntary withholding agreements are entered into by parties for the withholding of income tax and these parties do not treat themselves as engaged in an employer-employee relationship, the IRS may not consider the existence of such agreements as a factor when challenging worker classification arrangements.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See IRS, Pub. 1415, Research Analysis and Applied Statistics Federal Tax Compliance Research: Tax Gap Estimates for Tax Years 2014-2016 (Oct. 2022), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1415.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *Gig Economy in the U.S. – Statistics & Facts*, STATISTA, July 3, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/topics/4891/gig-economy-in-the-us>.

<sup>7</sup> See Treas. Reg. § 31.3121(d)-1(c); Rev. Rul. 87-41, 1987-1 C.B. 296; Internal Revenue Manual 4.23.5.7.1, Control Test (Dec. 10, 2013), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm\\_04-023-005r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part4/irm_04-023-005r).

<sup>8</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Small Business Owners’ Tax Simplification Act of 2017, H.R. 3717, 115th Cong. § 9 (2017), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3717>.

**Legislative Recommendation #64****Require the IRS to Specify the Information Needed in Third-Party Contact Notices****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The IRS may contact third parties to obtain information or documentation relating to taxpayers. Recognizing that third-party contacts (TPCs) “may have a chilling effect on the taxpayer’s business and could damage the taxpayer’s reputation in the community,” Congress has required the IRS to provide advance notice to affected taxpayers. However, the IRS sometimes does not tell the taxpayer what information it is seeking or give the taxpayer a reasonable opportunity to provide the information so it can avoid a TPC.
- *Solution:* Require the IRS to provide taxpayers with a tailored notice that identifies the specific information it plans to request from a third party, unless advance notice would jeopardize the collection of tax or another statutory exception applies.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7602(c)(1) generally requires the IRS to give taxpayers notice before contacting third parties (*e.g.*, banks, employers, employees, vendors, customers, friends, and neighbors) to request information about them. The IRS may provide this TPC notice only if it intends to make a TPC during the period specified in the notice, which may not exceed one year. Generally, the IRS must send the notice at least 45 days before making the TPC.<sup>1</sup> No law expressly requires the IRS to let the taxpayer know what specific information it needs (or seeks to verify) before contacting third parties.

IRC § 7602(c)(3) waives the TPC notice requirement if (i) the taxpayer has authorized the contact; (ii) the IRS determines for good cause that providing notice would jeopardize the IRS’s tax collection efforts or may involve reprisal against any person; or (iii) the contact is made in connection with a criminal investigation.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

The TPC notice requirement was enacted as part of the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998 (RRA 98).<sup>2</sup> The Senate report accompanying the bill explained that “taxpayers should have the opportunity to resolve issues and volunteer information before the IRS contacts third parties.”<sup>3</sup> The House-Senate conference report accompanying RRA 98 stated that “in general [the TPC] notice will be provided as part of an existing IRS notice.”<sup>4</sup> Based on the conference report language, the IRS implemented the TPC notice requirement by including generic language in Publication 1, *Your Rights as a Taxpayer*, which the IRS sends to taxpayers in a variety of circumstances, whether or not it plans to make a TPC.<sup>5</sup>

1 The 45-day requirement was enacted by the Taxpayer First Act (TFA). Pub. L. No. 116–25, § 1206, 133 Stat. 981, 990 (2019). The IRS has issued a notice of proposed rulemaking to address the TFA amendment that would shorten the 45-day notice period to ten days or eliminate it altogether under certain circumstances. See Advance Notice of Third-Party Contacts, 89 Fed. Reg. 20371, 20371-77 (proposed Mar. 22, 2024) (amending Treas. Reg. § 301.7602-2).

2 RRA 98, Pub. L. No. 105–206, § 3417(a), 112 Stat. 685, 757 (1998).

3 S. REP. NO. 105–174, at 77 (1998).

4 H.R. REP. NO. 105–599, at 277 (1998) (Conf. Rep.).

5 IRS, Pub. 1, *Your Rights as a Taxpayer* (Sept. 2017), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1.pdf>. Under the heading “Potential Third Party Contacts,” Pub. 1 states, in part: “[W]e sometimes talk with other persons if we need information that you have been unable to provide, or to verify information we have received.”

When Congress enacted the Taxpayer First Act (TFA) in 2019, it rejected the generic approach of including the TPC language in Publication 1. The TFA amended IRC § 7602(c) to require the IRS to send the TPC notice only when it intends to make a TPC and to send the TPC notice at least 45 days before making the contact.<sup>6</sup> In explaining the change, the House report accompanying the TFA quoted testimony from a former IRS official, who said the then-existing TPC notice requirement was “useless and does not effectively apprise taxpayers that such contact will be made, to whom it will be made, or that the taxpayer can request a third party contact report from the IRS.” The House report said TPCs “may have a chilling effect on the taxpayer’s business and could damage the taxpayer’s reputation in the community.” It also said the change would “provide taxpayers more of an opportunity to resolve issues and volunteer information before the IRS contacts third parties.”<sup>7</sup>

If the IRS were to include TPC notices as part of an existing IRS notice (such as Form 4564, Information Document Request) that requests information from the taxpayer, the 45-day period would give the taxpayer a realistic opportunity to avoid a TPC by providing the information requested on the form.<sup>8</sup> However, the IRS generally does not include a request for that information with the TPC notice.<sup>9</sup>

A tailored notice that identifies the specific information the IRS plans to request from a third party would be more effective in motivating taxpayers to provide the information themselves. The IRS previously tailored TPC notices in this way.<sup>10</sup> Generating tailored notices would not unduly burden the IRS because most TPCs are made in the collection context, where the IRS is seeking assets rather than information; TPC notices in the collection context are not implicated by this recommendation.<sup>11</sup> In the subset of cases where the IRS is seeking specific information, identifying what information the IRS is seeking would empower the taxpayer to protect their reputation by providing the information themselves so the TPC is unnecessary. Thus, using tailored TPC notices is consistent with a taxpayer’s *right to be informed* and *right to privacy*, which includes the right to expect enforcement to be no more intrusive than necessary,<sup>12</sup> and it might save IRS resources by reducing the number of TPCs.

6 Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1206, 133 Stat. 981, 990 (2019); see Advance Notice of Third-Party Contacts, 89 Fed. Reg. 20371, 20371-77 (proposed Mar. 22, 2024) (which would amend Treas. Reg. § 301.7602-2 to address TFA amendments and create several exceptions allowing it to shorten the 45-day notice requirement to 10 days or eliminate it altogether).

7 H.R. REP. NO. 116-39, pt. 1, at 44-45 (2019). This report accompanied H.R. 1957, 116th Cong. (2019). Congress ultimately made one change to H.R. 1957 unrelated to the TPC provision and enacted the TFA as H.R. 3151, 116th Cong. (2019). However, H.R. REP. NO. 116-39 remains the sole committee report explaining the TFA.

8 IRS Form 4564, Information Document Request (May 2023).

9 See, e.g., Internal Revenue Manual 5.9.3.12.1, Third Party Contacts (May 26, 2020), [https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm\\_05-009-003r](https://www.irs.gov/irm/part5/irm_05-009-003r); IRS, Letter 3164, Third-Party Notice.

10 For further discussion, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2015 Annual Report to Congress 123, 127 (Most Serious Problem: *Third Party Contacts: IRS Third Party Contact Procedures Do Not Follow the Law and May Unnecessarily Damage Taxpayers’ Businesses and Reputations*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC15\\_Volume1\\_MSP\\_12\\_Third-Party-Contacts.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC15_Volume1_MSP_12_Third-Party-Contacts.pdf); National Taxpayer Advocate Fiscal Year 2018 Objectives Report to Congress 98 (Area of Focus: *IRS Third Party Contact (TPC) Notices Should Be More Specific, Actionable, and Effective*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/JRC18\\_Volume1\\_AOF\\_12.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/JRC18_Volume1_AOF_12.pdf).

11 TPCs often arise from IRS requests for payment from third parties, such as banks served with a levy for the taxpayer’s funds on deposit or in connection with the advertising or conduct of public auction sales of the taxpayer’s property. A prior TAS study found the IRS made TPCs in 68.1 percent of its field collection cases and 8.5 percent of its field examination cases. National Taxpayer Advocate 2015 Annual Report to Congress 123 (Most Serious Problem: *Third Party Contacts: IRS Third Party Contact Procedures Do Not Follow the Law and May Unnecessarily Damage Taxpayers’ Businesses and Reputations*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC15\\_Volume1\\_MSP\\_12\\_Third-Party-Contacts.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC15_Volume1_MSP_12_Third-Party-Contacts.pdf). This recommendation generally does not cover collection contacts, because in those cases, the IRS is not asking a third party for information that the taxpayer could provide.

12 See Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TBOR), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/get-help/taxpayer-rights> (last visited Oct. 1, 2024). The rights contained in TBOR are also codified in IRC § 7803(a)(3).

**RECOMMENDATION**

- Amend IRC § 7602(c) to require the IRS to provide taxpayers with tailored notices that identify the specific information it plans to request from a third party. Before the IRS seeks such information from a third party, it should include the third-party contact notice with another IRS notice requesting such information in order to give taxpayers a reasonable opportunity to respond and provide the required information, unless an exception under IRC § 7602(c)(3) applies.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> If the taxpayer responds, the IRS may still contact a third party if it has a legitimate need to interview witnesses or corroborate information provided by the taxpayer.

**Legislative Recommendation #65****Enable the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Program to Assist More Taxpayers in Controversies With the IRS****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* In 1998, Congress created the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) grant program to provide free or nominal-cost representation to low-income taxpayers involved in controversies with the IRS and to provide education about taxpayer rights and responsibilities to taxpayers who speak English as a second language (ESL). The law capped the grant that could be awarded to any clinic at \$100,000 per year. The law also limited the grant amount a clinic may receive to the amount it raises from other sources. These restrictions prevent the LITC Program from assisting as many low-income taxpayers as it otherwise could.
- *Solution:* Eliminate the annual \$100,000 per-clinic funding cap and reduce the matching funds requirement when doing so would expand coverage to additional taxpayers.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7526 authorizes the Secretary, subject to the availability of appropriated funds, to provide matching grants for the development, expansion, or continuation of LITCs. The IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998 authorized the LITC Program to provide free or nominal-cost representation to low-income taxpayers who are involved in controversies with the IRS and to provide education about taxpayer rights and responsibilities in multiple languages for ESL taxpayers.

IRC § 7526(c)(1) imposes an annual aggregate limitation of \$6 million for LITC grants “[u]nless otherwise provided by specific appropriation.”

IRC § 7526(c)(2) imposes an annual limitation on grants to a single clinic of \$100,000.<sup>1</sup>

IRC § 7526(c)(5) limits the amount of LITC funding a clinic may receive to the amount it raises from other sources (*i.e.*, a 100 percent matching funds requirement). The match may be in cash or third-party in-kind contributions (*e.g.*, volunteer time, donated supplies).

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

The LITC Program is an effective and low-cost means to assist low-income and ESL taxpayers. In 2024, the LITC Program Office awarded grants to 138 organizations in 44 states and the District of Columbia. In 2024, clinics receiving grant funds represented over 20,000 taxpayers dealing with IRS tax controversies, including in cases before the U.S. Tax Court. They provided consultations or advice to over 17,000 additional taxpayers. The clinics worked closely with the Tax Court and the IRS Office of Chief Counsel to resolve docketed cases on a pre-trial basis where possible. They helped taxpayers secure more than \$11 million in tax refunds and reduced or corrected taxpayers’ liabilities by more than \$40 million. They also brought thousands of taxpayers back into filing and payment compliance, and helped ensure that individuals understood their rights and

1 In recent appropriations acts, Congress has doubled the per-clinic cap from \$100,000 to \$200,000. See, e.g., Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, Pub. L. No. 118-47, 138 Stat. 460, 526 (2024). This change has been helpful, but appropriations legislation is annual, and several clinics have told us they are reluctant to invest in raising additional matching funds and hiring and training additional employees unless they have assurance that these higher funding levels will be made available in future years. For that reason, we continue to recommend raising the caps in the authorizing legislation (*i.e.*, IRC § 7526).

responsibilities as U.S. taxpayers by conducting more than 1,800 educational activities that were attended by over 91,000 individuals.<sup>2</sup>

The success of the LITC Program is tied largely to the extensive use of volunteers. Over 1,500 volunteers contributed to the success of LITCs by volunteering about 42,000 hours of their time.<sup>3</sup>

There are many underserved low-income taxpayers across the nation who could benefit from LITC assistance. The overriding goal of LITC management is to provide quality service to more taxpayers. IRC § 7526 currently contains two restrictions that limit expansion of the LITC Program to serve additional taxpayers.

First, the annual limitation on grants to a single clinic of \$100,000, which has remained unchanged since 1998, prevents the LITC Program Office from awarding additional funds to qualified clinics that have demonstrated excellence in assisting low-income and ESL taxpayers and the ability to efficiently handle more cases. Even if the restriction were to be retained, the \$100,000 cap enacted in 1998 would have to be raised to nearly \$200,000 simply to reflect the effects of inflation.<sup>4</sup> However, the LITC Program Office could ensure more taxpayers receive LITC services if it is given discretion to provide larger grants to clinics that demonstrate they can use the funds productively. The objective is not to create a small number of “super clinics”; we believe it is important to maintain maximum geographic coverage for taxpayers across the United States. Rather, as more taxpayers are becoming comfortable working with service providers remotely and as the Tax Court has begun to offer virtual trial sessions, we believe some clinics will be able to achieve economies of scale that will allow them to serve considerably more taxpayers at comparatively less cost, including taxpayers in areas that do not currently have an LITC.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the 100 percent matching funds requirement in some cases serves as a barrier to coverage. The purpose of the match requirement is to ensure that each clinic’s management has a broad commitment to assisting taxpayers and to encourage clinics to recruit tax professionals on a volunteer basis to assist additional taxpayers. In general, strong clinics do not have difficulty meeting the requirement, and we believe the match requirement generally should be retained. But in certain circumstances, resources to meet the match requirement may be limited. The LITC Program Office has encountered difficulty identifying and funding clinics in certain geographic areas, and a lower match requirement should make it economically feasible for additional clinics to operate.

In addition, if our recommendation to eliminate the \$100,000 per-clinic funding cap is adopted, clinics that can meet the 100 percent matching funds requirement when receiving grants of \$100,000 may have difficulty raising funds in excess of \$100,000 on a 1:1 basis. Thus, clinics awarded grants in excess of \$100,000 should not be held to the same 100 percent matching funds requirement. The same is true for new clinics that are trying to get off the ground in underserved areas. Taxpayers would be better served if the LITC Program Office is given the discretion, delegated by the Secretary of the Treasury, to reduce the matching percentage in these circumstances (but not below 25 percent) where doing so would expand coverage to additional taxpayers.

2 Email from Management and Program Analyst, TAS LITC Program Office (Oct. 25, 2024) (providing updated data for 2024).

3 *Id.*

4 See U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI Inflation Calculator, [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm) (last visited Oct. 18, 2024).

5 In 2019, Congress authorized an analogous program, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) matching grant program, which provides free tax return preparation for individuals with low to moderate incomes (*i.e.*, below the maximum Earned Income Tax Credit threshold), individuals with disabilities, and individuals with limited English proficiency. The VITA statute, IRC § 7526A, was modeled after the LITC statute but does not impose any limitation on the amount that may be awarded to a qualifying grantee.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Eliminate the \$100,000 per-clinic funding cap imposed under current law by removing subsection (2) from IRC § 7526(c) and renumbering subsequent subsections accordingly.
- Amend IRC § 7526(c)(5) to retain the 100 percent “matching funds” requirement as the general rule but provide that the Secretary has the discretion to allow a lesser matching rate (but not less than 25 percent) where doing so would expand coverage to additional taxpayers.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic Modernization Act of 2024, H.R. 8876, 118th Cong. § 2 (2024).

**Legislative Recommendation #66****Compensate Taxpayers for “No Change” National Research Program Audits****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* To refine its audit selection formulas, the IRS audits a randomly selected group of taxpayers each year, effectively making them “guinea pigs” to help it improve the way it does its job. These National Research Program (NRP) audits impose burdens on the selected taxpayers, as they often incur fees for representation by a tax professional, must devote considerable time to gathering and organizing requested documentation, and experience the stress of an IRS audit.
- *Solution:* Absent fraud, compensate taxpayers who undergo NRP audits that do not result in changes to their tax liabilities and consider waiving any tax, interest, and penalties that result from these audits.

**PRESENT LAW**

There is no provision under present law that authorizes compensation of taxpayers who are audited under the IRS’s NRP or provides relief from the assessment of tax, interest, and penalties that may result from NRP audits.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Through the NRP, the IRS conducts audits of randomly selected taxpayers. The NRP benefits tax administration by enabling the IRS to gather strategic information about taxpayer compliance behavior as well as information about the causes of reporting errors. This information helps the IRS update its workload selection formulas and thereby enables it to focus its audits on returns with a relatively high likelihood of error. It also helps the IRS to estimate the “tax gap.” In addition, NRP studies benefit Congress by providing taxpayer compliance information that is useful in formulating tax policies.

For the thousands of individual taxpayers (or businesses) that are subject to NRP audits, however, they impose significant burdens.<sup>1</sup> In essence, these taxpayers, even if fully compliant, serve as “guinea pigs” to help the IRS improve the way it does its job. They must contend with random and sometimes intensive audits that consume their time, drain resources (including representation fees), and may impose an emotional and reputational toll.

In 1995, the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Oversight held a hearing on the NRP’s predecessor, the Taxpayer Compliance Measurement Program (TCMP).<sup>2</sup> Testimony provided during the hearing, and subsequent witness responses to questions-for-the-record, indicated that TCMP audits imposed a heavy burden on taxpayers and reflected a strong view that audited taxpayers were bearing the brunt of a research project intended to benefit the tax system as a whole. Proposals raised at the hearing included compensating taxpayers selected for TCMP audits as well as possibly waiving tax, interest, and penalties assessed during the audits.

1 IRS, Form 1040 – Individual Income Tax, National Research Program, <https://nrp.web.irs.gov/1040-study.html> (last visited Aug. 27, 2024).

2 *Taxpayer Compliance Measurement Program: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Oversight of the H. Comm. on Ways and Means*, 104th Cong. (1995), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-104hhrg20681/pdf/CHRG-104hhrg20681.pdf>.

Following the hearing, the House Budget Committee included a proposal in its 1995 budget reconciliation bill to compensate individual taxpayers by providing a tax credit of up to \$3,000 for TCMP-related expenses.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, this proposal was not adopted. Instead, the IRS was pressured to stop conducting TCMP audits. The inability to perform regular TCMP audits, however, undermined effective tax administration because it prevented the IRS from updating its audit selection formulas. Using older formulas likely meant that more compliant taxpayers faced (unproductive) audits and that audit revenue declined.

About a decade later, the IRS reinstated the TCMP under the new NRP name. Some procedures have since changed, but the burden on many of these taxpayers remains substantially unchanged. For the same reasons identified during the 1995 House hearing, the National Taxpayer Advocate believes it is appropriate to recognize that taxpayers audited under the NRP are bearing a heavy burden to help the IRS improve the effectiveness of its compliance activities. A tax credit or authorized payment would alleviate the monetary component of the burden. Further relief could be provided by waiving any assessment of tax, interest, and penalties resulting from an NRP audit.<sup>4</sup> However, this waiver should not apply where tax fraud or an intent to evade tax is uncovered in an NRP audit.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Compensate taxpayers for “no change” NRP audits through a tax credit or other means.<sup>5</sup>
- Consider waiving the assessment of tax, interest, and penalties resulting from an NRP audit, absent fraud or an intent to evade federal taxes.

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<sup>3</sup> See H.R. REP. NO. 104-280, vol. 2, at 28 (1995).

<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, legislation could require NRP-audited taxpayers to pay any additional tax owed and limit relief to interest and penalties. However, to the extent the purpose of NRP audits is to identify areas where NRP-audited taxpayers are underreporting tax so the IRS can revise its audit selection formulas, a waiver of tax as well as interest and penalties may be more effective, as taxpayers might be more forthcoming with auditors if they are assured they will not face additional assessments (absent fraud).

<sup>5</sup> For legislative language that would allow a deduction for certain individual taxpayers of up to \$5,000 for qualified NRP expenses, see Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act of 2023, S. 1177 and H.R. 2681, 118th Cong. § 14 (2023).

**Legislative Recommendation #67****Improve Tax and Financial Literacy by Promoting Interagency Collaboration and Modernizing the Requirement That the IRS Publish Graphics Summarizing Government Revenue and Spending****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Limited tax and financial literacy is a significant problem in this country that has costly consequences for taxpayers and the government alike. In 2003, Congress took an important step to improve financial literacy by creating the Financial Literacy and Education Commission (FLEC), whose members are 24 federal agencies. FLEC has a range of duties related to promoting financial literacy and education, but none specifically address tax literacy. Separately, Congress has required the IRS to publish pie charts showing major income and outlay categories in the instructions for the Form 1040. This requirement, enacted in 1990 when paper instructions were the norm, does not capture current data visualization practices.
- *Solution:* Amend 20 U.S.C. § 9703 to include the promotion of tax literacy among the duties of the FLEC or create a separate multi-agency commission focused on tax literacy, and modernize the requirement that the IRS publish graphics showing government revenue and spending.

**PRESENT LAW**

In 2003, Congress created FLEC, a multi-agency task force responsible for developing a national strategy on financial education.<sup>1</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 9703(a)(1) directs FLEC, through the authority of its members, “to take such actions as it deems necessary to streamline, improve, or augment the financial literacy and education programs, grants, and materials of the Federal Government, including curricula for all Americans.” 20 U.S.C. § 9703(a)(2) directs FLEC to emphasize “basic personal income and household money management and planning skills.” 20 U.S.C. § 9703 imposes additional requirements on FLEC, such as developing best practices for teaching financial literacy to higher education students, maintaining a website that is a clearinghouse for information about federal financial literacy and education programs, and developing and disseminating materials to promote financial literacy and education to the public.

IRC § 7523(a), enacted in 1990, requires the IRS to include in a prominent place in the instructions for Form 1040 two pie-shaped charts showing the relative sizes of “major outlay categories” and “major income categories.”<sup>2</sup> IRC § 7523(b)(1) defines major outlay categories as (1) defense, veterans, and foreign affairs; (2) Social Security, Medicare, and other retirement; (3) physical, human, and community development; (4) social programs; (5) law enforcement and general government; and (6) interest on the debt. IRC § 7523(b)(3) requires the chart for major outlay categories to include footnotes that break down some of the categories, such as the percentages of the defense outlays for veterans and foreign affairs. IRC § 7523(b)(2) defines major income categories as (1) Social Security, Medicare, and unemployment and other retirement taxes; (2) personal income taxes; (3) corporate income taxes; (4) borrowing to cover the deficit; and (5) excise, customs, estate, gift, and miscellaneous taxes.

1 Financial Literacy and Education Improvement Act, Pub. L. No. 108-159, Title V, § 513, 117 Stat. 1952, 2003 (2003) (codified at 20 U.S.C. §§ 9701-9707); see also U.S. Dep’t of the Treasury, *Financial Literacy and Education Commission*, <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/consumer-policy/financial-literacy-and-education-commission> (last visited Oct. 24, 2024).

2 Pub. L. No. 101-508, Title XI, § 11622(a), 104 Stat. 1388, 1388-504 (1990).

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

Limited tax and financial literacy is a significant problem in this country.<sup>3</sup> In 2023 alone, it is estimated that insufficient financial literacy in the United States cost more than \$388 billion, or about \$1,506 per adult.<sup>4</sup>

Having a basic understanding of taxes and the U.S. tax system is important because taxes influence how people make decisions that impact many areas of their lives. Tax and financial literacy are intertwined in financial decision-making, including managing a household budget, saving for retirement, paying for education, buying a house, and starting or expanding a small business. Filing a tax return is often a prerequisite for obtaining loans and other financial resources required for success and stability, including small business loans, home mortgages, and federal student aid.

The National Taxpayer Advocate commends the IRS for its efforts to work with other federal agencies to promote taxpayer education and outreach. However, significant knowledge gaps remain. There is a need for the IRS and other federal agencies to develop a more coordinated approach to providing tax-focused education in a meaningful and systemic way and to incorporate tax literacy content into other agencies' financial literacy programming. Congress took an important step to improve financial literacy in this country when it created FLEC. In its two decades of existence, FLEC has performed an impressive array of work, including developing a financial education website, holding public hearings on important issues related to financial literacy, and issuing reports that look at financial literacy from a variety of perspectives.<sup>5</sup> The National Taxpayer Advocate encourages Congress to show a similar commitment to tax literacy by amending the law that created FLEC to include duties related to promoting tax literacy or creating a separate multi-agency commission focused on tax literacy.

Another way in which Congress can promote tax literacy is by updating the requirements in IRC § 7523. An important component in tax literacy is understanding the role of the U.S. tax system. The public benefits from seeing where the money that funds the government comes from and the purposes for which the government uses it, and it is likely that some taxpayers who perceive that connection will be more compliant with their tax obligations. The requirements in IRC § 7523 are outdated, reflecting that they were enacted in 1990 when paper instructions were the norm. Today, there are better ways to visualize and present this data to the public. To give taxpayers a more complete picture of the role of taxes in our lives, the National Taxpayer Advocate recommends that Congress amend IRC § 7523 to modernize its requirements by directing the IRS to develop and post graphics on IRS.gov that present information on government revenue and spending in a way that uses plain language and incorporates technology to provide an interactive data visualization experience.<sup>6</sup>

3 See National Taxpayer Advocate 2024 Annual Report to Congress, [www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/AnnualReport2024](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/AnnualReport2024).

4 Nat'l Financial Educators Coun., *Financial Illiteracy Cost Americans \$1,506 in 2023*, <https://www.financialeducatorscouncil.org/financial-literacy-costs> (last visited Oct. 19, 2024).

5 For examples of FLEC's reports, see U.S. Dep't of the Treasury, *Financial Literacy and Education Commission, Resources*, <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/consumer-policy/financial-literacy-and-education-commission>.

6 For additional background, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2020 Purple Book, *Compilation of Legislative Recommendations to Strengthen Taxpayer Rights and Improve Tax Administration 9 (Require the IRS to Provide Taxpayers With a "Receipt" Showing How Their Tax Dollars Are Being Spent)*, [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC19\\_PurpleBook\\_01\\_StrengthRights\\_3.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ARC19_PurpleBook_01_StrengthRights_3.pdf).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Amend 20 U.S.C. § 9703 to include the promotion of tax literacy among the duties of FLEC or create a similar multi-agency commission focused on tax literacy.
- Amend IRC § 7523 to require the IRS to develop, post on IRS.gov, and update at least annually graphics that present information on government revenue and spending in an accessible manner and that use interactive data visualization to provide taxpayers with an understanding of the U.S. tax system. Also, require the IRS to publicize the availability of this information.

**Legislative Recommendation #68****Establish the Position of IRS Historian Within the Internal Revenue Service to Record and Publish Its History****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Unlike many other federal agencies, the IRS does not have a historian to catalog and publish an analysis of its successes and failures. This is significant because many of the challenges the IRS faces are recurring, such as its decades-long efforts to modernize its information technology systems and its efforts to strike the appropriate balance between collecting delinquent taxes and respecting taxpayer rights. To cite an adage, those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.
- *Solution:* Establish the position of IRS historian within the IRS to catalog and publish analyses of the agency's successes and failures.

**PRESENT LAW**

The IRS, as a federal agency, is required to properly maintain and manage its records under the Federal Records Act<sup>1</sup> and to provide public access to these records under the Freedom of Information Act.<sup>2</sup> However, the IRS is not required to publish a historical analysis of its tax administration programs and policies.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

The IRS's mission, priorities, and challenges have remained relatively constant over time. For example, even with the significant funding the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has given the IRS to transform tax administration and taxpayer services, the IRS's IRA Strategic Operating Plan (SOP) for fiscal years 2023-2031 conveys similar themes to prior strategic plans, including to:

- Dramatically improve services to help taxpayers meet their obligations and receive the tax incentives for which they are eligible.
- Quickly resolve taxpayer issues when they arise.
- Focus expanded enforcement on taxpayers with complex tax filings and high-dollar noncompliance to address the tax gap.
- Deliver cutting-edge technology, data, and analytics to operate more effectively.
- Attract, retain, and empower a highly skilled, diverse workforce and develop a culture that is better equipped to deliver results for taxpayers.<sup>3</sup>

For the most part, these themes and objectives have been the same for several decades, and they are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.<sup>4</sup> As IRS officials retire and are replaced and as leaders in the oversight community (including Congress, the Government Accountability Office, and the Treasury Inspector General

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<sup>1</sup> 44 U.S.C. §§ 3101-3107.

<sup>2</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 552.

<sup>3</sup> IRS, Pub. 3744, IRS Inflation Reduction Act Strategic Operating Plan (Apr. 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p3744.pdf>; IRS, Pub. 3744-A, 2024 IRA Strategic Operating Plan Annual Update Supplement (Apr. 2024), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p3744a.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Some parts of the IRS's mission have evolved. Increasingly, the IRS has been called upon to administer social benefits programs (e.g., the Earned Income Tax Credit and child tax credit) and to administer financial relief payments (e.g., stimulus payments during the pandemic). As is apparent in the IRA SOP, technology, data, and analytics are also increasingly important to the agency. In these areas, too, a thorough history would help policymakers pinpoint where and how additional resources should be targeted.

for Tax Administration) retire and are replaced, new leaders would benefit enormously from an objective recording and assessment of prior IRS initiatives to achieve its strategic goals.

Numerous offices of history operate in the executive, judicial, and legislative branches.<sup>5</sup> Government historians serve various roles, such as researching and writing for publication and internal use, editing historical documents, preserving historical sites and artifacts, and providing historical information to the public through websites and other media.<sup>6</sup> Historians should be objective and accurate.<sup>7</sup> For example, the Historian of the Department of State is required to publish a documentary history of the foreign policy decisions and actions of the United States, including facts providing support for and alternative views to policy positions ultimately adopted, without omitting or concealing defects in policy.<sup>8</sup> Historians in federal agencies promote transparency and accountability in this way. Because more U.S. citizens interact with the IRS than any other federal agency, the public interest and potential benefits of learning from the agency's successes and failures are particularly high.

During the early 1990s, the IRS decided to hire an IRS historian. However, the relationship was tense, and the individual who held the position told Congress that the IRS undermined her work and fought transparency, concluding that “the IRS shreds its paper trail, which means there is no history, no evidence, and ultimately no accountability.”<sup>9</sup> The IRS eliminated the position and never hired a historian again. The National Taxpayer Advocate believes the IRS should be required to have a historian to assist it in avoiding mistakes of the past and to promote transparency.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Add a new subsection to IRC § 7803 to establish the position of IRS historian within the IRS. The IRS historian should have expertise in federal taxation and archival methods, be appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury in consultation with the Archivist of the United States, and report to the Commissioner of Internal Revenue. The duties of the IRS historian require access to IRS records, including tax returns and return information (subject to the confidentiality and disclosure provisions of IRC § 6103). The IRS historian should be required to report IRS history objectively and accurately, without omitting or concealing defects in policy.<sup>10</sup>

5 *History at the Federal Government*, Soc’y for History in the Fed. Gov’t, <https://shfg.wildapricot.org/history-at-fedgov> (last visited Aug. 16, 2024).

6 Soc’y for History in the Fed. Gov’t, *HISTORICAL PROGRAMS IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: A GUIDE* (1992), <https://shfg.wildapricot.org/Historical-Programs-Guide>.

7 *Id.*

8 22 U.S.C. § 4351(b).

9 See *Practices & Procedures of the Internal Revenue Service, Hearings Before the S. Comm. on Finance*, 105th Cong. 35 (1997) (statement of Shelley Davis, former IRS Historian).

10 For additional background, see National Taxpayer Advocate 2011 Annual Report to Congress 582 (Legislative Recommendation: *Appoint an IRS Historian*), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2011\\_ARC\\_Legislative-Recommendations.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2011_ARC_Legislative-Recommendations.pdf).

**Legislative Recommendation #69****Postpone Tax Deadlines for Hostages and Individuals Wrongfully Detained Abroad****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* U.S. taxpayers who are held hostage or wrongfully detained in foreign countries generally cannot file tax returns or make tax payments, yet under current law they may be subject to interest charges and penalties that the IRS does not have the legal authority to waive.
- *Solution:* Automatically postpone tax filing and payment deadlines for hostages and individuals who are wrongfully detained abroad and their spouses and provide for the refund or abatement of penalties, interest, and other additional amounts assessed.

**PRESENT LAW**

IRC § 7508A(a) gives the Secretary of the Treasury or her delegate the authority to postpone the deadline for performing certain acts under the internal revenue laws for a taxpayer determined by the Secretary or her delegate to be affected by a terroristic<sup>1</sup> or military action as defined in IRC § 692(c)(2).<sup>2</sup> IRC § 7508A(a) limits a deadline postponement to one year in response to each terroristic or military action.

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

Individuals who are held hostage or wrongfully detained abroad must currently rely on the Secretary's discretionary authority to postpone the deadlines to submit tax filings, make tax payments, and perform other time-sensitive tax-related actions. Additionally, the Treasury Secretary's discretionary authority to postpone these deadlines is limited to up to one year. Individuals who are held hostage or wrongfully detained abroad should not have to rely on the Treasury Secretary's discretionary authority to relieve them from the consequences of their inability to meet their tax obligations. Additionally, the duration of the postponement should match the duration of the hostage's or detainee's inability to meet their tax obligations and should not be subject to a one-year limit.

**RECOMMENDATION**

- Establish an automatic postponement of the tax deadlines set forth in IRC § 7508(a)(1), as incorporated in IRC § 7508A(a)(1), for individuals who are held hostage or unlawfully detained abroad (and their spouses) that extends for the duration the hostage or detainee is unable to comply with their time-sensitive tax obligations due to being held hostage or unlawfully detained, plus one year.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> IRC § 692(c)(2) defines a terroristic action as "any terroristic activity which a preponderance of the evidence indicates was directed against the United States or any of its allies."

<sup>2</sup> Section 4.01(1) of Revenue Procedure 2004-26, 2004-1 C.B. 890, provides that prior to publishing a determination that an event outside the United States constitutes a terroristic action within the meaning of IRC § 692(c)(2), the Secretary or her delegate will ascertain whether the Department of State and the Department of Justice believe that a preponderance of the evidence indicates the event resulted from terrorist activity directed against the United States or its allies.

<sup>3</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see Stop Tax Penalties on American Hostages Act of 2024, S. 4057, 118th Cong. § 2 (2024). If the non-detained spouse is due a refund because of overwithholding or excess estimated tax payments, the non-detained spouse should be authorized to file a current return to receive the refund and then file a superseding joint return with the detained spouse for up to one year after the detained spouse's release.

## APPENDIX 1: Additional Reference Materials for Legislative Recommendations in This Volume

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
<b>Strengthen Taxpayer Rights</b>			
1	Elevate the Importance of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights by Redesignating It as Section 1 of the Internal Revenue Code.	NTA 2017 Annual Report 93; NTA 2016 Annual Report 15; NTA 2016 Annual Report 98; NTA 2013 Annual Report 51; NTA 2013 Annual Report 5; NTA 2011 Annual Report 493; NTA 2007 Annual Report 478.	<a href="#">H.R. 7341</a> , 117th Cong. § 2 (2022).
2	Require the IRS to Timely Process Claims for Credit or Refund.	N/A	N/A
<b>Improve the Filing Process</b>			
3	Treat Electronically Submitted Tax Payments and Documents as Timely If Submitted on or Before the Applicable Deadline.	NTA 2017 Annual Report 278.	Tax Administration Simplification Act, <a href="#">S. 5316</a> , 118th Cong. § 4 and <a href="#">H.R. 8864</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2024); Electronic Communication Uniformity Act, <a href="#">S. 1338</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2023); <a href="#">H.R. 7844</a> , 117th Cong. § 4 (2022); <a href="#">H.R. 3278</a> , 117th Cong. § 1 (2021); <a href="#">H.R. 7641</a> , 116th Cong. § 1 (2020).

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
4	Authorize the IRS to Establish Minimum Competency Standards for Federal Tax Return Preparers and Revoke the Identification Numbers of Sanctioned Preparers.	NTA 2022 Annual Report 128-140; NTA 2021 Annual Report 163; NTA 2009 Annual Report 41; NTA 2008 Annual Report 423.	Tax Refund Protection Act, <a href="#">S. 1209</a> and <a href="#">H.R. 2702</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2023); <a href="#">H.R. 7341</a> , 117th Cong. § 2 (2022); <a href="#">S. 2856</a> , 117th Cong. § 1 (2021); <a href="#">H.R. 5375</a> , 117th Cong. § 1 (2021); <a href="#">H.R. 4184</a> , 117th Cong. § 2 (2021); <a href="#">H.R. 3737</a> , 117th Cong. § 2 (2021); <a href="#">H.R. 3738</a> , 117th Cong. § 401 (2021); <a href="#">S. 1192</a> , 116th Cong. § 2(c) (2019); <a href="#">S. 1138</a> , 116th Cong. § 5(c) (2019); <a href="#">H.R. 3157</a> , 116th Cong. § 5 (2019); <a href="#">H.R. 3330</a> , 116th Cong. § 2 (2019); <a href="#">H.R. 3466</a> , 116th Cong. § 1 (2019); <a href="#">H.R. 4751</a> , 116th Cong. § 2 (2019); <a href="#">H.R. 8501</a> , 116th Cong. § 2 (2019); <a href="#">S. 3278</a> , 115th Cong. § 202 (2018); <a href="#">H.R. 4912</a> , 114th Cong. § 401 (2016); <a href="#">S. 676</a> , 114th Cong. § 406 (2015); <a href="#">S. 2333</a> , 114th Cong. § 202 (2015); <a href="#">H.R. 4128</a> , 114th Cong. § 202 (2015); <a href="#">S. 137</a> , 114th Cong. § 2 (2015); <a href="#">H.R. 4141</a> , 114th Cong. § 2 (2015); <a href="#">H.R. 1528</a> , 108th Cong. § 141 (2004) (passed by Senate); <a href="#">S. 882</a> , 108th Cong. § 141 (2003) (reported by Sen. Fin. Comm.), <i>see also</i> <a href="#">S. REP. NO. 108-257</a> , at 30-31 (2003).
5	Extend the Time for Small Businesses to Make Subchapter S Elections.	NTA 2010 Annual Report 410; NTA 2004 Annual Report 390; NTA 2002 Annual Report 246.	Tax Administration Simplification Act, <a href="#">S. 5316</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 and <a href="#">H.R. 8864</a> , 118th Cong. § 3 (2024); <a href="#">S. 3278</a> , 115th Cong. § 304 (2018); <a href="#">S. 711</a> , 115th Cong. § 7 (2017); <a href="#">H.R. 1696</a> , 115th Cong. § 7 (2017); <a href="#">H.R. 1</a> , 113th Cong. § 3606 (2014); <a href="#">S. 2271</a> , 112th Cong. § 2 (2012); <a href="#">H.R. 3629</a> , 109th Cong. § 2 (2005); <a href="#">H.R. 3841</a> , 109th Cong. § 302 (2005).
6	Adjust Individual Estimated Tax Payment Deadlines to Occur Quarterly.	NTA 2022 Annual Report 54.	Tax Administration Simplification Act, <a href="#">S. 5316</a> , 118th Cong. § 3 and <a href="#">H.R. 8864</a> , 118th Cong. § 4 (2024); Tax Deadline Simplification Act, <a href="#">H.R. 3708</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2023); <a href="#">H.R. 4214</a> , 117th Cong. § 2 (2021); <a href="#">H.R. 5979</a> , 116th Cong. § 2 (2020); <a href="#">H.R. 593</a> , 116th Cong. § 2 (2019); <a href="#">S. 3278</a> , 115th Cong. § 305 (2018); <a href="#">H.R. 3717</a> , 115th Cong. § 2 (2017).

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
7	Eliminate Duplicative Reporting Requirements Imposed by the Bank Secrecy Act and the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act.	NTA 2015 Annual Report 353.	Tax Simplification for Americans Abroad Act, <a href="#">H.R. 5432</a> , 118th Cong. § 4 (2023); <a href="#">H.R. 5799</a> , 117th Cong. § 3 (2021) (FATCA exception for certain individuals); <a href="#">H.R. 4362</a> , 116th Cong. § 3 (2019) (same); <a href="#">S. 869</a> , 115th Cong. § 2 (2017) (pertaining to FATCA reporting requirements repeal); <a href="#">H.R. 2054</a> , 115th Cong. § 2 (2017) (same); <a href="#">H.R. 2136</a> , 115th Cong. § 2 (2017) (FATCA exception for certain individuals); <a href="#">H.R. 5935</a> , 114th Cong. § 2 (2016) (pertaining to FATCA reporting requirements repeal); <a href="#">S. 663</a> , 114th Cong. § 2 (2015) (same); <a href="#">S. 887</a> , 113th Cong. § 2 (2013) (same).
8	Authorize the Use of Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Grant Funding to Assist Taxpayers With Applications for Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers.	N/A	N/A
<b>Improve Assessment and Collection Procedures</b>			
9	Require That Math Error Notices Describe the Reason(s) for the Adjustment With Specificity, Inform Taxpayers They May Request Abatement Within 60 Days, and Be Mailed by Certified or Registered Mail.	NTA 2021 Annual Report 89; NTA 2018 Annual Report 174; NTA 2014 Annual Report 163; NTA 2011 Annual Report 74; NTA 2004 Annual Report 163; NTA 2003 Annual Report 113; NTA 2001 Annual Report 33.	Internal Revenue Service Math and Taxpayer Help Act, <a href="#">H.R. 8067</a> and <a href="#">S.4549</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2024).
10	Continue to Limit the IRS's Use of "Math Error Authority" to Clear-Cut Categories Specified by Statute.	NTA 2018 Annual Report 164, 174; NTA 2015 Annual Report 329; NTA 2014 Annual Report 163; NTA 2011 Annual Report 74.	N/A
11	Require Independent Managerial Review and Written Approval Before the IRS May Assert Multiyear Bans Barring Taxpayers From Receiving Certain Tax Credits and Clarify That the Tax Court Has Jurisdiction to Review the Assertion of Multiyear Bans.	NTA 2019 Annual Report vol. 2, at 239; NTA 2013 Annual Report 103.	N/A
12	Give Taxpayers Abroad Additional Time to Request Abatement of a Math Error Assessment.	NTA 2022 Annual Report 165; NTA 2016 Annual Report 393.	N/A
13	Give Taxpayers Abroad Additional Time to Request a Collection Due Process Hearing and to File a Petition Challenging a Notice of Determination in the Tax Court.	NTA 2022 Annual Report 165; NTA 2016 Annual Report 393; NTA 2002 Annual Report 244.	N/A

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
14	Provide That Assessable Penalties Are Subject to Deficiency Procedures.	NTA 2021 Annual Report 179; NTA 2020 Annual Report 119.	N/A
15	Direct the IRS to Implement an Automated Formula to Identify Taxpayers at Risk of Economic Hardship.	NTA 2020 Annual Report 249.	Improving IRS Customer Service Act, <a href="#">S. 5280</a> , 118th Cong. § 5 (2024).
16	Provide That “an Opportunity to Dispute” an IRS-Determined Tax Liability in a Collection Due Process Hearing Includes an Opportunity to Dispute Such Liability in the U.S. Tax Court.	NTA 2021 Annual Report 179; NTA 2018 Annual Report 367.	N/A
17	Prohibit the IRS from Withholding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Portion of a Taxpayer’s Refund to Satisfy Federal Tax Liabilities.	NTA 2021 Annual Report 179; NTA 2016 Annual Report 325; NTA 2009 Annual Report 365.	N/A
18	Eliminate Installment Agreement User Fees for Low-Income Taxpayers and Those Paying by Direct Debit.	NTA 2021 Annual Report 179; NTA 2017 Annual Report 307; NTA 2015 Annual Report 14; NTA 2007 Annual Report 66.	Affordable Payment Agreements for Taxpayers Act, <a href="#">H.R. 2675</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2023); <a href="#">S. 1793</a> , 115th Cong. § 301 (2017); <a href="#">S. 3471</a> , 114th Cong. § 504 (2016) (reported by Sen. Fin. Comm.) (low-income fee waiver provisions and limitation on future increase), <i>see also</i> <a href="#">S. REP. NO. 114-375</a> , at 84 (2016); <a href="#">S. 3156</a> , 114th Cong. § 114 (2016) (low-income fee waiver provisions and limitation on future increase), <i>see also</i> <a href="#">S. REP. NO. 114-298</a> , at 17-19 (2016); <a href="#">S. 1321</a> , 109th Cong. § 301 (2006); <a href="#">H.R. 1528</a> , 108th Cong. § 101 (2004) (passed by Senate); <a href="#">S. 882</a> , 108th Cong. § 101 (2003), <i>see also</i> <a href="#">S. REP. NO. 108-257</a> , at 5-6 (2003).
19	Improve Offer in Compromise Program Accessibility by Repealing the Upfront Payment Requirements.	NTA 2006 Annual Report 507.	Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act of 2023, <a href="#">S. 1177</a> and <a href="#">H.R. 2681</a> , 118th Cong. § 17 (2023); <a href="#">H.R. 7033</a> , 117th Cong. § 17 (2022); <a href="#">H.R. 3738</a> , 117th Cong. § 206 (2021); <a href="#">S. 1656</a> , 117th Cong. § 17 (2021); <a href="#">H.R. 8700</a> , 116th Cong. § 206 (2020); <a href="#">S. 2689</a> , 115th Cong. § 17 (2018); <a href="#">H.R. 2171</a> , 115th Cong. § 206 (2017); <a href="#">H.R. 4912</a> , 114th Cong. § 206 (2015); <a href="#">H.R. 2343</a> , 111th Cong. § 2 (2009).

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
20	Require the IRS to Consider a Taxpayer's Current Income When Determining Whether to Waive or Reimburse an Installment Agreement User Fee.	NTA 2021 Annual Report 179.	N/A
21	Modify the Requirement That the Office of Chief Counsel Review Certain Offers in Compromise.	N/A	<a href="#">S. 1793</a> , 115th Cong. § 303 (2017); <a href="#">S. 1578</a> , 114th Cong. § 403 (2015); <a href="#">S. 1321</a> , 109th Cong. § 304 (2005); (reported in Senate), <i>see also</i> <a href="#">S. REP. NO. 109-336</a> , at 20-21 (2006); <a href="#">H.R. 1528</a> , 108th Cong. § 104 (2004) (passed by Senate); <a href="#">S. 882</a> , 108th Cong. § 104 (2003), <i>see also</i> <a href="#">S. REP. NO. 108-257</a> , at 8-9 (2003); <a href="#">H.R. 1661</a> , 108th Cong. § 334 (2003); <a href="#">H.R. 1528</a> , 108th Cong. § 304 (2003) (passed by House), <i>see also</i> <a href="#">H.R. REP. NO. 108-61</a> , at 43-44 (2003); <a href="#">H.R. 5728</a> , 107th Cong. § 204 (2002) (passed by House); <a href="#">H.R. 3991</a> , 107th Cong. § 304 (2002), <i>see also</i> <a href="#">H.R. REP. NO. 107-394</a> , at 25 (2002); <a href="#">H.R. 5549</a> , 107th Cong. § 104 (2002); <a href="#">H.R. 5763</a> , 107th Cong. § 204 (2002).
22	Require the IRS to Mail Notices at Least Quarterly to Taxpayers With Delinquent Tax Liabilities.	N/A	<a href="#">H.R. 7844</a> , 117th Cong. § 2 (2022); <a href="#">S. 3278</a> , 115th Cong. § 201 (2018).
23	Clarify When the Two-Year Period for Requesting Return of Levy Proceeds Begins.	N/A	<a href="#">H.R. 7844</a> , 117th Cong. § 3 (2022).
24	Protect Retirement Funds From IRS Levies, Including So-Called "Voluntary" Levies, Absent Flagrant Conduct by a Taxpayer.	NTA 2015 Annual Report 340; NTA 2006 Annual Report 527.	<a href="#">H.R. 3738</a> , 117th Cong. § 203 (2021); <a href="#">H.R. 8700</a> , 116th Cong. § 203 (2020); <a href="#">H.R. 2171</a> , 115th Cong. § 203 (2017); <a href="#">H.R. 3340</a> , 115th Cong. § 204 (2017); <a href="#">H.R. 4912</a> , 114th Cong. § 203 (2016); <a href="#">S. 2333</a> , 114th Cong. §§ 306 and 307 (2015); <a href="#">H.R. 4128</a> , 114th Cong. §§ 306 and 307 (2015).

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
25	Provide Taxpayer Protections Before the IRS Recommends the Filing of a Lien Foreclosure Suit on a Principal Residence.	NTA 2019 Annual Report 176; NTA 2012 Annual Report 537.	Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act of 2023, <a href="#">S. 1177</a> and <a href="#">H.R. 2681</a> , 118th Cong. § 11 (2023); <a href="#">H.R. 7033</a> , 117th Cong. § 11 (2022); <a href="#">S. 1656</a> , 117th Cong. § 11 (2021); <a href="#">S. 2689</a> , 115th Cong. § 11 (2018); <a href="#">S. 949</a> , 114th Cong. § 16 (2015); <a href="#">H.R. 1828</a> , 114th Cong. § 16 (2015); <a href="#">S. 2215</a> , 113th Cong. § 8 (2014).
26	Provide Collection Due Process Rights to Third Parties Holding Legal Title to Property Subject to IRS Collection Actions.	NTA 2019 Annual Report 176; NTA 2012 Annual Report 544.	<a href="#">S. REP. NO. 105-174</a> , at 68 (1998) (Senate report accompanying its version of the RRA 98 legislation referred to “[t]he taxpayer (or affected third party).”).
27	Extend the Time Limit for Taxpayers to Sue for Damages for Improper Collection Actions.	N/A	<a href="#">S. 1793</a> , 115th Cong. § 201(c) (2017) (extends the time limit, though not by the recommended amount); <a href="#">S. 1578</a> , 114th Cong. § 301(c) (2015) (same).
28	Revise the Private Debt Collection Rules to More Accurately Identify and Protect Taxpayers With Incomes Below 200 Percent of the Federal Poverty Level.	N/A	N/A
<b>Reform Penalty and Interest Provisions</b>			
29	Convert the Estimated Tax Penalty Into an Interest Provision to Properly Reflect Its Substance.	NTA 2013 Annual Report vol. 2, at 1-13; NTA 2008 Annual Report vol. 2, at 34-36.	<a href="#">H.R. 1528</a> , 108th Cong. § 101 (2003) (passed by House), <i>see also</i> <a href="#">H.R. REP. NO. 108-61</a> , at 23-24 (2003); <a href="#">H.R. 1661</a> , 108th Cong. § 301 (2003).
30	Apply a Single Interest Rate to Underpayments of Estimated Tax in the Periods Between Each Installment Due Date.	N/A	<a href="#">S. 1793</a> , 115th Cong. § 305 (2017); <a href="#">S. 1578</a> , 114th Cong. § 405 (2015); <a href="#">H.R. 1528</a> , 108th Cong. § 101 (2003) (passed by House), <i>see also</i> <a href="#">H.R. REP. NO. 108-61</a> , at 25 (2003).
31	Extend the Reasonable Cause Defense for the Failure-to-File Penalty to Taxpayers Who Rely on Return Preparers to E-File Their Returns.	N/A	N/A
32	Authorize a Penalty for Tax Return Preparers Who Engage in Fraud or Misconduct by Altering a Taxpayer’s Tax Return.	NTA 2011 Annual Report 558.	<a href="#">H.R. 3340</a> , 115th Cong. § 101 (2017); <a href="#">S. 2333</a> , 114th Cong. § 203 (2015); <a href="#">H.R. 4128</a> , 114th Cong. § 203 (2015).
33	Clarify That Supervisory Approval Is Required Under IRC § 6751(b) Before Proposing Penalties.	NTA 2023 Annual Report 151-152; NTA 2019 Annual Report 157.	IRS Accountability and Taxpayer Protection Act, <a href="#">S. 1249</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2023).

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
34	Require an Employee to Determine and a Supervisor to Approve All Negligence Penalties Under IRC § 6662(b)(1).	N/A	N/A
35	Modify the Definition of “Willful” for Purposes of Determining Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts Violations and Reduce the Maximum Penalty Amounts.	NTA 2023 Annual Report 109-110; NTA 2014 Annual Report 331-345.	N/A
<b>Strengthen Taxpayer Rights Before the Office of Appeals</b>			
36	Require Taxpayers’ Consent Before Allowing IRS Counsel or Compliance Personnel to Participate in Appeals Conferences.	NTA 2023 Annual Report 135; NTA 2022 Annual Report 149-150; NTA 2019 Annual Report 62-68; NTA 2017 Annual Report 203.	Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act of 2023, <a href="#">S. 1177</a> and <a href="#">H.R. 2681</a> , 118th Cong. § 7 (2023); Strengthen Taxpayer Rights Act of 2023, <a href="#">H.R. 6332</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2023); <a href="#">H.R. 7033</a> , 117th Cong. § 7 (2021); <a href="#">S. 1656</a> , 117th Cong. § 7 (2021); <a href="#">S. 3278</a> , 115th Cong. § 601 (2018); <a href="#">S. 2689</a> , 115th Cong. § 7 (2018).
<b>Strengthen the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate</b>			
37	Clarify That the National Taxpayer Advocate May Hire Legal Counsel to Enable Her to Advocate More Effectively for Taxpayers.	NTA 2016 Annual Report 37; NTA 2011 Annual Report 573; NTA 2002 Annual Report 198.	National Taxpayer Advocate Enhancement Act of 2023, <a href="#">H.R. 2755</a> , 118th Cong. § 2(a) (2023); Taxpayer Advocate Enhancement Act, <a href="#">S. 1283</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2023); <a href="#">S. 5311</a> , 117th Cong. § 4 (2022); <a href="#">H.R. 1528</a> , 108th Cong. § 306 (2003) (passed by House), <i>see also</i> <a href="#">H.R. Rep. No. 108-61</a> , at 44-45 (2003); <a href="#">H.R. 1661</a> , 108th Cong. § 335 (2003).
38	Clarify the Authority of the National Taxpayer Advocate to Make Personnel Decisions to Protect the Independence of the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate.	N/A	National Taxpayer Advocate Enhancement Act of 2023, <a href="#">H.R. 2755</a> , 118th Cong. § 2(b) (2023).
39	Clarify the Taxpayer Advocate Service’s Access to Files, Meetings, and Other Information.	NTA 2016 Annual Report 34.	<a href="#">S. 2333</a> and <a href="#">H.R. 4128</a> , 114th Cong. § 403 (2015).
40	Authorize the National Taxpayer Advocate to File <i>Amicus</i> Briefs.	NTA 2016 Annual Report 37; NTA 2011 Annual Report 573; NTA 2002 Annual Report 198.	N/A
41	Authorize the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate to Assist Certain Taxpayers Experiencing Economic Hardships During a Lapse in Appropriations.	NTA Fiscal Year 2020 Objectives Report to Congress 40-44; NTA Fiscal Year 2015 Objectives Report to Congress 79-91; NTA 2011 Annual Report 552.	<a href="#">S. 2333</a> and <a href="#">H.R. 4128</a> , 114th Cong. § 404 (2015) (TAS may provide assistance to taxpayers facing enforcement actions during a lapse in appropriations).

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
42	Repeal Statute Suspension Under IRC § 7811(d) for Taxpayers Seeking Assistance From the Taxpayer Advocate Service.	NTA 2015 Annual Report 316.	<a href="#">H.R. 3738</a> , 117th Cong. § 202 (2021); <a href="#">H.R. 8700</a> , 116th Cong. § 202 (2020); <a href="#">H.R. 2171</a> , 115th Cong. § 202 (2017); <a href="#">H.R. 4912</a> , 114th Cong. § 202 (2016).
<b>Strengthen Taxpayer Rights in Judicial Proceedings</b>			
43	Expand the U.S. Tax Court's Jurisdiction to Hear Refund Cases.	NTA 2018 Annual Report 364.	N/A
44	Authorize the U.S. Tax Court to Order Refunds or Credits in Collection Due Process Proceedings Where Liability Is at Issue.	NTA 2017 Annual Report 293.	N/A
45	Promote Consistency With the Supreme Court's <i>Boechler</i> Decision by Making the Time Limits for Bringing All Tax Litigation Subject to Equitable Judicial Doctrines.	NTA 2017 Annual Report 283.	N/A
46	Extend the Deadline for Taxpayers to File a Refund Suit When They Request Appeals Reconsideration of a Notice of Claim Disallowance But the IRS Has Not Timely Decided Their Claim.	N/A	N/A
47	Authorize the Tax Court to Sign Subpoenas for the Production of Records Held by a Third Party Prior to a Scheduled Hearing.	N/A	N/A
48	Provide That the Scope of Judicial Review of Innocent Spouse Determinations Under IRC § 6015 Is <i>De Novo</i> .	NTA 2011 Annual Report 531.	N/A
49	Clarify That Taxpayers May Raise Innocent Spouse Relief as a Defense in Collection, Bankruptcy, and Refund Cases.	NTA 2018 Annual Report 387; NTA 2010 Annual Report 377; NTA 2009 Annual Report 378; NTA 2007 Annual Report 549.	N/A
50	Fix the Donut Hole in the Tax Court's Jurisdiction to Determine Overpayments by Non-Filers With Filing Extensions.	NTA 2018 Annual Report 392.	N/A

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
<b>Miscellaneous Recommendations</b>			
51	Restructure the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to Make It Simpler for Taxpayers and Reduce Improper Payments.	NTA 2022 Annual Report 51-53; NTA 2021 Annual Report 163; NTA Fiscal Year 2020 Objectives Report vol. 3, at 8, 14, 17-19; NTA 2016 Annual Report 334.	EITC for Older Workers Act of 2024, <a href="#">H.R. 9361</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2024) (remove upper age limit only); Working Families Tax Relief Act of 2023, <a href="#">S. 1992</a> , 118th Cong. § 101 (2023) (modify age requirement); Lower Your Taxes Act, <a href="#">H.R. 5953</a> , 118th Cong. § 3 (2023) (lower age to 18 and remove upper age limit); EITC Age Parity Act of 2023, <a href="#">H.R. 5689</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2023) (lower age to 18 and remove upper age limit); EITC Modernization Act, <a href="#">H.R. 5421</a> , 118th Cong. § 3 (2023) (lower age to 18 and remove upper age limit); Worker Relief and Credit Reform Act of 2023, <a href="#">H.R. 1468</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2023) (lower age to 18 and remove upper age limit); <a href="#">H.R. 4665</a> , 117th Cong. § 2 (2021) (lower age to 18 and remove upper age limit); <a href="#">H.R. 174</a> , 117th Cong. § 3 (2021) (lower age to 18 and remove upper age limit); <a href="#">H.R. 5376</a> , 117th Cong. § 137401 (2021) (as reported in House) (modify age requirement); <a href="#">H.R. 8352</a> , 116th Cong. § 30203 (2020) (lower age to 18 and remove upper age limit); <a href="#">H.R. 5271</a> , 116th Cong. § 2 (2019) (lower age to 18 and remove upper age limit); <a href="#">HR 4954</a> , 116th Cong. § 2 (2019) (lower age to 19, 18 for homeless and former foster youth, and increase maximum age to 68); <a href="#">H.R. 3507</a> , 116th Cong. § 401 (2019) (lower age to 19, 18 for former foster youth, and increase maximum age to 68); <a href="#">H.R. 3157</a> , 116th Cong. § 2 (2019) (lower age to 19 and increase maximum age to 68); <a href="#">H.R. 1436</a> , 116th Cong. § 3 (2019) (lower age to 18 and remove upper age limit); <a href="#">S. 2790</a> , 116th Cong. § 2 (2019) (lower age to 19, 18 for homeless and former foster youth, and increase maximum age to 68); <a href="#">S. 1138</a> , 116th Cong. § 2 (2019) (lower age to 19 and increase maximum age to 68);

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
			<a href="#">H.R. 6873</a> , 115th Cong. § 3 (2018) (lower age to 18); <a href="#">H.R. 4074</a> , 115th Cong. § 1501 (2017) (lower age to 21 and increase maximum age to retirement age); <a href="#">H.R. 3465</a> , 115th Cong. § 401 (2017) (lower age to 21, 18 for former foster youth, and increase maximum age to 68); <a href="#">H.R. 2681</a> , 115th Cong. § 2 (2017) (lower age to 21, 18 for former foster youth, and increase maximum age to 68); <a href="#">H.R. 4946</a> , 114th Cong. § 2 (2016) (lower age to 21); <a href="#">H.R. 3005</a> , 114th Cong. § 201 (2015) (lower age to 21, 18 for former foster youth, and increase maximum age to 68); <a href="#">H.R. 2721</a> , 114th Cong. § 1701 (2015) (lower age to 21 and increase maximum age to retirement age); <a href="#">H.R. 5352</a> , 113th Cong. § 1901 (2014) (lower age to 21 and increase maximum age to retirement age).
52	Adopt a Consistent and More Modern Definition of “Qualifying Child” Throughout the Internal Revenue Code.	NTA 2022 Annual Report 50; NTA 2018 Annual Report 421; NTA 2006 Annual Report 463.	N/A
53	Permanently Give Taxpayers Affected by Federally Declared Disasters the Option of Using Prior Year Earned Income to Claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).	N/A	Tax Fairness for Disaster Victims Act, <a href="#">H.R. 2619</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2023).
54	Allow the Limitation on Theft Loss Deductions in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act to Expire So Scam Victims Are Not Taxed on Amounts Stolen From Them.	N/A	N/A
55	Amend the Lookback Period for Allowing Tax Credits or Refunds to Include the Period of Any Postponement or Additional or Disregarded Time for Timely Filing a Tax Return.	NTA 2018 Annual Report 392.	Disaster Tax Lookback Parity Act of 2024, <a href="#">H.R. 8007</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2024).
56	Protect Taxpayers in Federally Declared Disaster Areas Who Receive Filing and Payment Relief From Inaccurate and Confusing Collection Notices.	N/A	N/A

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
57	Allow Taxpayers in Limited Circumstances to Claim the Child Tax Credit With Respect to Children Who Do Not Have Social Security Numbers But Otherwise Qualify for the Credit.	NTA Fiscal Year 2020 Objectives Report to Congress 48.	N/A
58	Clarify Whether Dependents Are Required to Have Taxpayer Identification Numbers for Purposes of the Credit for Other Dependents.	N/A	<a href="#">H.R. CONF. REP. NO. 115-466</a> , 115th Cong., 1st. Sess. 225-227 (Dec. 15, 2017).
59	Allow Members of Certain Religious Sects That Do Not Participate in Social Security and Medicare to Obtain Employment Tax Refunds.	N/A	Religious Exemptions for Social Security and Healthcare Taxes Act, <a href="#">H.R. 8819</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2024); <a href="#">H.R. 6183</a> , 117th Cong. § 2 (2021); <a href="#">H.R. 2714</a> , 116th Cong. § 2 (2019).
60	Remove the Requirement That Written Receipts Acknowledging Charitable Contributions Must Be “Contemporaneous”.	N/A	N/A
61	Establish a Uniform Standard Mileage Deduction Rate for All Purposes.	N/A	N/A
62	Eliminate the Marriage Penalty for Nonresident Aliens Who Otherwise Qualify for the Premium Tax Credit.	N/A	N/A
63	Encourage and Authorize Independent Contractors and Service Recipients to Enter Into Voluntary Withholding Agreements.	NTA 2016 Annual Report 322; NTA 2012 Annual Report 19; NTA 2010 Annual Report 371; NTA 2008 Annual Report 375.	<a href="#">H.R. 593</a> , 116th Cong. § 9 (2019); <a href="#">H.R. 1625</a> , 116th Cong. § 2(b) (2019); <a href="#">S. 700</a> , 116th Cong. § 2(b) (2019); <a href="#">H.R. 3717</a> , 115th Cong. § 9 (2017).
64	Require the IRS to Specify the Information Needed in Third-Party Contact Notices.	N/A	Taxpayer Notification and Privacy Act of 2023, <a href="#">S. 2111</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2023).
65	Enable the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Program to Assist More Taxpayers in Controversies With the IRS.	N/A	Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic Modernization Act of 2024, <a href="#">H.R. 8876</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2024).
66	Compensate Taxpayers for “No Change” National Research Program Audits.	N/A	Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act of 2023, <a href="#">S. 1177</a> and <a href="#">H.R. 2681</a> , 118th Cong. § 14 (2023) (in part); <a href="#">H.R. 7033</a> , 117th Cong. § 14 (2022) (in part); <a href="#">S. 5041</a> , 117th Cong. § 2 (2022); <a href="#">S. 1656</a> , 117th Cong. § 14 (2021) (in part); <a href="#">S. 2689</a> , 115th Cong. § 14 (2018) (in part); <a href="#">H.R. REP. NO. 104-280</a> , vol. 2, at 28 (1995).

LR #	Tax Administration Legislative Recommendations	National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Annual Report References	Congressional Bill and Committee Report References
67	Improve Tax and Financial Literacy by Promoting Interagency Collaboration and Modernizing the Requirement That the IRS Publish Graphics Summarizing Government Revenue and Spending.	N/A	N/A
68	Establish the Position of IRS Historian Within the Internal Revenue Service to Record and Publish Its History.	NTA 2011 Annual Report 582.	N/A
69	Postpone Tax Deadlines for Hostages and Individuals Wrongly Detained Abroad.	N/A	Stop Tax Penalties on American Hostages Act of 2024, <a href="#">S. 4057</a> and <a href="#">H.R. 7791</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2024); Stop Terror-Financing and Tax Penalties on American Hostages Act, <a href="#">H.R. 9495</a> , 118th Cong. § 2 (2024) (passed by House on Nov. 21, 2024); <i>see also</i> <a href="#">H. Rept. No. 118-729</a> , at 7-11 (2024).

Note: This table is current through December 13, 2024, based on bill text available at Congress.gov. Additional bills and committee reports relating to National Taxpayer Advocate legislative recommendations may have been introduced, enacted, or printed after our publication deadline.

## APPENDIX 2: Prior National Taxpayer Advocate Legislative Recommendations Enacted Into Law

LR #	Legislative Recommendations	Selected National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Report References	Public Laws Adopting the Recommendations (in Whole or in Part)
<b>Strengthen Taxpayer Rights</b>			
1	Enact a Taxpayer Bill of Rights.	NTA 2014 Annual Report, Legislative Recommendation #1, 275-310; NTA 2013 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #1, 1-5.	Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Pub. L. No. 114-113, Division Q, Title IV, § 401, 129 Stat. 2242, 3117 (2015) (codified at IRC § 7803(a)(3)). Division Q is called the "Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes Act of 2015" or PATH Act.
2	Require the IRS to Provide Annual Taxpayer Rights Training to Employees.	2017 Purple Book LR #2, 5-7.	Taxpayer First Act (TFA), Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 2402(2), 133 Stat. 981, 1014 (2019).
3	Improve Customer Service by Meeting the Preferences of Taxpayers and Stakeholders.	NTA 2008 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #6, 95-113.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1101(a), 133 Stat. 981, 985 (2019).
4	Revamp the IRS Budget Structure and Provide Sufficient Funding to Improve the Taxpayer Experience and Modernize the IRS's Information Technology Systems.	NTA 2021 Annual Report, 48, 62, 77, 106, 146; 2020 Purple Book LR #2, 3-6; NTA 2019 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #1, 3-14; NTA 2019 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #2, 15-22; NTA 2019 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #3, 23-33.	Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, Pub. L. No. 117-169, 136 Stat. 1818 (2022).
<b>Improve the Filing Process</b>			
5	Authorize the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Grant Program.	2019 Purple Book LR #3, 8-10; 2017 Purple Book LR #5, 12-13.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1401(a), 133 Stat. 981, 993 (2019) (codified at IRC § 7526A).
6	Authorize the IRS to Work With Financial Institutions to Reverse Misdirected Deposits.	2019 Purple Book LR #9, 20-21; 2017 Purple Book LR #11, 24-25.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1407, 133 Stat. 981, 1001 (2019) (codified at IRC § 6402(n)).
7	Provide Victims With Notice of Suspected Identity Theft.	NTA 2011 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #3, 48-73.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 2007, 133 Stat. 981, 1005 (2019) (codified at IRC § 7529).
8	Give All Taxpayers the Option to Receive and Use an Identity Protection Personal Identification Number.	NTA 2017 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #19, 211-218; NTA 2015 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #16, 180-187.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 2005, 133 Stat. 981, 1004 (2019).
9	Provide Identity Theft Victims With a Single Point of Contact at the IRS.	NTA 2017 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #19, 211-218; NTA 2015 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #16, 180-187; NTA 2013 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #6, 75-83; NTA 2011 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #3, 48-73.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 2006, 133 Stat. 981, 1004 (2019).

LR #	Legislative Recommendations	Selected National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Report References	Public Laws Adopting the Recommendations (in Whole or in Part)
10	Develop and Implement Guidelines for Managing Stolen Identity Refund Fraud Cases.	NTA 2017 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #19, 211-218; NTA 2015 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #16, 180-187; NTA 2013 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #6, 75-83; NTA 2011 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #3, 48-73.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 2008, 133 Stat. 981, 1006 (2019).
11	Collaborate With the Public and Private Sectors to Protect Taxpayers From Identity Theft and Refund Fraud.	NTA 2017 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #20, 219-226.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 2001, 133 Stat. 981, 1001 (2019).
12	Require Employers Filing More Than Five Forms W-2, 1099-MISC, and 941 to File Them Electronically.	2019 Purple Book LR #8, 17-19; 2017 Purple Book LR #10, 21-23.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 2301, 133 Stat. 981, 1012 (2019) (codified at IRC § 6011(e)(2)(A)).
13	Increase Preparer Penalties.	NTA 2003 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation, 270-301.	United States-Korea Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act, Pub. L. No. 112-41, Title V, § 501, 125 Stat. 428, 459 (2011) (codified at IRC § 6695(g)).
14	Allow Married Co-owners of a Business to Elect to File as Sole Proprietors Rather Than as Partners.	NTA 2002 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation, 172-184.	U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007, Pub. L. No. 110-28, Title VIII, § 8215, 121 Stat. 112, 193 (2007) (codified at IRC § 761).
15	Tax a Child's Income at Rates That Do Not Depend on the Parents' Income ( <i>i.e.</i> , Fix the "Kiddie Tax").	NTA 2002 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation, 231-242.	Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), Pub. L. No. 115-97, § 11001, 131 Stat. 2054 (2017) (codified at IRC § 1).
16	Authorize the IRS to Require Brokers to Report Basis Information Upon the Sale of Securities.	NTA 2005 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation #5, 433-441.	Energy Improvement and Extension Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-343, Div. B, Title IV, § 403, 122 Stat. 3765, 3854 (2008) (codified at IRC § 6045(g)).
17	Accelerate the Filing Deadline for Certain Information Returns.	NTA 2013 Annual Report, vol. 2, 68-96.	PATH Act, Pub. L. No. 114-113, Division Q, Title II § 201, 129 Stat. 2242, 3076 (2015) (codified at IRC § 6071(c)).
18	Do Not Require Correction of <i>De Minimis</i> Errors on Certain Information Returns.	NTA 2013 Annual Report, vol. 2, 68-96.	PATH Act, Pub. L. No. 114-113, Division Q, Title II § 202, 129 Stat. 2242, 3076 (2015) (codified at IRC § 6721(c)).
19	Accelerate the Filing Deadline for Certain Partnerships and Trusts.	NTA 2003 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation, 302-307.	Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-41, § 2006(a), 129 Stat. 443, 457 (2015) (codified at IRC § 6072).

LR #	Legislative Recommendations	Selected National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Report References	Public Laws Adopting the Recommendations (in Whole or in Part)
20	Change the Deadline for Filing FinCEN Report 114 (Relating to Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts) to Match the Deadline for Filing Federal Income Tax Returns and Form 8938 (Including Extensions).	NTA 2014 Annual Report, Legislative Recommendation #6, 331-333.	Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-41, § 2006(b)(11), 129 Stat. 443, 458-459 (2015).
21	Eliminate Tax Strategy Patents.	NTA 2007 Annual Report, Legislative Recommendation #4, 512-524.	Leahy-Smith America Invents Act, Pub. L. No. 112-29, § 14(a), 125 Stat. 284, 327 (2011).
<b>Improve Assessment and Collection Procedures</b>			
22	Extend the Period for a Third Party to Request a Return of Levied Proceeds From Nine Months to Two Years.	NTA 2001 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation, 202-208.	TCJA, Pub. L. No. 115-97, § 11071, 131 Stat. 2054, 2091 (2017) (codified at IRC § 6343(b)).
23	Allow Taxpayers to Request Equitable Innocent Spouse Relief Under IRC § 6015(f) Any Time Before Expiration of the Period of Limitations on Collection.	2019 Purple Book LR #26, 48-49; 2017 Purple Book LR #16, 33.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1203, 133 Stat. 981, 988 (2019) (codified at IRC § 6015(f)(2)).
24	Prevent the Debts of Low Income Taxpayers From Being Assigned to Private Collection Agencies.	2019 Purple Book LR #28, 52-53.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1205, 133 Stat. 981, 989 (2019) (codified at IRC § 6306(d)(3)).
25	Hold Taxpayers Harmless When the IRS Returns Funds Levied From a Retirement Plan or Account.	2017 Purple Book LR #22, 41-42.	Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (BBA 2018), Pub. L. No. 115-123, Div. D, Title II, § 41104, 132 Stat. 64, 155-156 (2018) (codified at IRC § 6343(f)).
26	Authorize the IRS to Enter Into Partial Payment Installment Agreements That Do Not Fully Pay the Liability Before Expiration of the Limitations Period.	NTA 2001 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation, 210-214.	American Jobs Creation Act of 2004 (AJCA), Pub. L. No. 108-357, § 843, 118 Stat. 1418, 1600 (2004) (codified at IRC § 6159(a)).
27	Send Change of Address Notices to an Employer's Old and New Addresses and Promote the Use of Offers in Compromise for Victims of Payroll Tax Fraud.	NTA 2012 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #23, 426-444.	Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-76, Division E, Title I, § 106, 128 Stat. 5 (2014) and subsequent appropriations acts.

LR #	Legislative Recommendations	Selected National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Report References	Public Laws Adopting the Recommendations (in Whole or in Part)
<b>Reform Penalty and Interest Provisions</b>			
28	Clarify That a Reasonable Cause Exception Applies to the Penalty for Erroneous Refund or Credit Claims Under IRC § 6676.	NTA 2014 Annual Report, Legislative Recommendation #8, 351-356; NTA 2011 Annual Report, Legislative Recommendation #6, 544-547.	PATH Act, Pub. L. No. 114-113, Division Q, Title II, § 209(c), 129 Stat. 2242, 3085 (2015) (codified at IRC § 6676(a)).
29	Notify Exempt Organizations When They Have Failed to File Two Consecutive Returns or Notices Before Their Exemption Is Automatically Revoked.	NTA 2011 Annual Report, Status Update #2, 437-450.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 3102, 133 Stat. 981, 1016 (2019) (codified at IRC § 6033(j)(1)).
30	Reduce the Disproportionate Penalty for Failure to Make Special Disclosures of "Listed Transactions" Under IRC § 6707A.	NTA 2008 Annual Report, Legislative Recommendation #10, 419-422.	Small Business Jobs Act of 2010 (SBJA), Pub. L. No. 111-240, § 2041, 124 Stat. 2504, 2560 (2010) (codified at IRC § 6707A(b)).
<b>Strengthen Taxpayer Rights Before the Office of Appeals</b>			
31	Codify the Independent Office of Appeals and Allow Those Denied Access to Appeals to Protest to the IRS Commissioner.	2019 Purple Book LR #35, 64.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1001(a), 133 Stat. 981, 983 (2019) (codified at IRC § 7803(e)).
<b>Enhance Confidentiality and Disclosure Protections</b>			
32	Limit Redislosures and Unauthorized Uses of Tax Returns and Tax Return Information Obtained Through IRC § 6103-Based "Consent" Disclosures.	2019 Purple Book LR #38, 67; 2017 Purple Book LR #39, 66.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 2202, 133 Stat. 981, 1012 (2019) (codified at IRC § 6103(c)).
33	Penalize Unauthorized Disclosures of Return Information by Tax Whistleblowers.	NTA 2015 Annual Report, Legislative Recommendation #14, 413-418.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1405(a)(2), 133 Stat. 981, 998 (2019) (codified at IRC § 7213(a)(2)).
34	Provide Status Updates Sufficient to Allow a Whistleblower to Monitor the Progress of the Claim.	NTA 2015 Annual Report, Most Serious Problem #13, 143-158.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1405(a)(1), 133 Stat. 981, 997-998 (2019) (codified at IRC § 6103(k)(13)).
<b>Strengthen the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate</b>			
35	Codify the Taxpayer Advocate Directive (TAD) Appeal Process and Require the NTA to Report to Congress on Any TAD Not Honored by the IRS.	2019 Purple Book LR #43, 75-76; 2017 Purple Book LR #41, 68-69; NTA 2016 Annual Report, Special Focus, 39-40.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1301(a), 133 Stat. 981, 991-992 (2019) (codified at IRC § 7803(c)(5) and IRC § 7803(c)(2)(B)(ii)(VIII)).
36	Establish the Compensation of the NTA by Statute and Eliminate Eligibility for Cash Bonuses.	2019 Purple Book LR #49, 83-84; 2017 Purple Book LR #49, 79-80.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1301(c), 133 Stat. 981, 993 (2019) (codified at IRC § 7803(c)(1)(B)(i)).

LR #	Legislative Recommendations	Selected National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Report References	Public Laws Adopting the Recommendations (in Whole or in Part)
<b>Strengthen Taxpayer Rights in Judicial Proceedings</b>			
37	Clarify That IRS Employees May Refer Taxpayers to a Specific Low Income Taxpayer Clinic.	2019 Purple Book LR #14, 29-30; 2017 Purple Book LR #8, 18; NTA 2007 Annual Report, Additional Legislative Recommendation #4, 551-553.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1402, 133 Stat. 981, 997 (2019) (codified at IRC § 7526(c)(6)).
38	Consolidate Judicial Review of Collection Due Process (CDP) Hearings in the Tax Court.	NTA 2005 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation #7, 447-470.	Pension Protection Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-280, § 855, 120 Stat. 780, 1019 (2006) (codified at IRC § 6330(d)(1)).
39	Clarify That the Scope and Standard of Tax Court Determinations Under IRC § 6015(f) Is <i>De Novo</i> .	2019 Purple Book LR #52, 91-93; NTA 2011 Annual Report, Legislative Recommendation #4, 531-536.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1203(a)(1), 133 Stat. 981, 988 (2019) (codified at IRC § 6015(e)(7)).
40	Clarify That the Tax Court Has Jurisdiction to Review Stand-Alone Equitable Innocent Spouse Relief Determinations Under IRC § 6015(f).	NTA 2001 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation, 159-165.	Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-432, Division C, Title IV, § 408, 120 Stat. 2922, 3061-3062 (2006) (codified at IRC § 6015(e)(1)).
41	Allow Taxpayers Seeking Exemption Under IRC § 501(c)(4) and Certain Others to Seek a Declaratory Judgment Just Like Those Seeking Exemption Under IRC § 501(c)(3).	NTA 2014 Annual Report, Legislative Recommendation #12, 371-379.	PATH Act, Pub. L. No. 114-113, Division Q, Title IV, § 406, 129 Stat. 2242, 3120 (2015) (codified at IRC § 7428(a)(1)).
42	Protect Tax Whistleblowers From Retaliation.	NTA 2015 Annual Report, Legislative Recommendation #13, 409-412.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1405(b), 133 Stat. 981, 998-999 (2019) (codified at IRC § 7623(d)).
<b>Miscellaneous Provisions</b>			
43	Generally Avoid Forfeiture or Seizure of Deposits Structured to Avoid Currency Reporting When They Are From a Legal Source.	IRS Reform: Perspectives From the National Taxpayer Advocate, Hearing Before the H. Comm. on Oversight, 115th Cong. (May 19, 2017) (statement of Nina E. Olson, National Taxpayer Advocate), 23.	TFA, Pub. L. No. 116-25, § 1201, 133 Stat. 981, 986-987 (2019) (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 5317(c)(2)).
44	Provide Commercial Fishermen the Benefit of Income Averaging Currently Available to Commercial Farmers.	NTA 2001 Annual Report, Additional Legislative Recommendation, 226.	AJCA, Pub. L. No. 108-357, § 314(b), 118 Stat. 1418, 1468-1469 (2004) (codified at IRC § 1301(a)).
45	Allow Self-Employed Individuals a Deduction for Health Insurance Premiums.	NTA 2001 Annual Report, Additional Legislative Recommendation, 223.	SBJA, Pub. L. No. 111-240, § 2042, 124 Stat. 2504, 2560 (2010) (codified at IRC § 162(l)).
46	Clarify That Attorney Fees for Discrimination Suits Are Deductible by Victims.	NTA 2002 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation, 161-171.	AJCA, Pub. L. No. 108-357, § 703, 118 Stat. 1418, 1546-1548 (2004) (codified at IRC § 62(a)(19) and then subsequently renumbered).

LR #	Legislative Recommendations	Selected National Taxpayer Advocate (NTA) Report References	Public Laws Adopting the Recommendations (in Whole or in Part)
47	Create a Uniform Definition of a “Qualifying Child” for Tax Provisions Relating to Children and Family Status.	NTA 2001 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation, 78-100.	Working Families Tax Relief Act of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-311, § 201, 118 Stat. 1166, 1169-1175 (2004) (codified at IRC § 152).
48	Amend IRC §§ 108(a) and 6050P to Provide That Gross Income Does Not Include, and the Department of Education Is Not Required to Report, Income From the Cancellation of Student Loans Under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.	2020 Purple Book LR #59, 131-132.	American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), Pub. L. No. 117-2, § 9675, 135 Stat. 4, 185-186 (2021) (codified at IRC §108(f)(5).
49	Restructure the Earned Income Tax Credit to Make It Simpler for Taxpayers and Reduce Improper Payments.	NTA Fiscal Year 2020 Objectives Report, vol. 3, at 8, 14, 17-19; 2020 Purple Book LR #53, 115-119.	ARPA, Pub. L. No. 117-2, §§ 9621, 9622, and 9623, 135 Stat. 4, 152-154 (2021) (codified at IRC § 32).
50	Provide Earned Income Tax Credit Relief During National Disasters.	2021 Purple Book LR #54, 120-121.	ARPA, Pub. L. No. 117-2, § 9626, 135 Stat. 4, 157 (2021).
51	Whistleblower Program: Amend IRC §§ 7623 and 6103 to Provide Consistent Treatment of Recovered Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) and Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts (FBAR) Penalties for Whistleblower Award Purposes.	NTA 2015 Annual Report, Key Legislative Recommendation, 419-425.	BBA 2018, Pub. L. No. 115-123, Div. D, Title II, § 41108(a) to (c), 132 Stat. 64, 158 (2018) (codified at IRC § 7623(c)).

Note: As of December 13, 2024, approximately 51 legislative recommendations proposed by the National Taxpayer Advocate had been enacted into law. We say “approximately” because in some cases, enacted provisions are substantially similar to what we recommended but are not identical. Additional legislative recommendations may have been enacted after our publication deadline.





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