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# Your Rights as a Taxpayer

*The first part of this publication explains some of your most important rights as a taxpayer. The second part explains the examination, appeal, collection, and refund processes.*

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## **THE IRS MISSION**

*PROVIDE AMERICA'S  
TAXPAYERS TOP QUALITY  
SERVICE BY HELPING THEM  
UNDERSTAND AND MEET  
THEIR TAX RESPONSIBILITIES  
AND BY APPLYING THE TAX  
LAW WITH INTEGRITY AND  
FAIRNESS TO ALL.*

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## **Declaration of Taxpayer Rights**

### **I. Protection of Your Rights**

IRS employees will explain and protect your rights as a taxpayer throughout your contact with us.

### **II. Privacy and Confidentiality**

The IRS will not disclose to anyone the information you give us, except as authorized by law. You have the right to know why we are asking you for information, how we will use it, and what happens if you do not provide requested information.

### **III. Professional and Courteous Service**

If you believe that an IRS employee has not treated you in a professional, fair, and courteous manner, you should tell that employee's supervisor. If the supervisor's response is not satisfactory, you should write to your IRS District Director or Service Center Director.

### **IV. Representation**

You may either represent yourself or, with proper written authorization, have someone else represent you in your place. Your representative must be a person allowed to practice before the IRS, such as an attorney, certified public accountant, or enrolled agent. If you are in an interview and ask to consult such a person, then we must stop and reschedule the interview in most cases.

You can have someone accompany you at an interview. You may make sound recordings of any meetings with our examination, appeal, or collection personnel, provided you tell us in writing 10 days before the meeting.

### **V. Payment of Only the Correct Amount of Tax**

You are responsible for paying only the correct amount of tax due under the law — no more, no less. If you cannot pay all of your tax when it is due, you may be able to make monthly installment payments.

### **VI. Help With Unresolved Tax Problems**

The National Taxpayer Advocate's Problem Resolution Program can help you if you have tried unsuccessfully to resolve a problem with the IRS. Your local Taxpayer Advocate can offer you special help if you have a significant hardship as a result of a tax problem. For more information, call toll-free 1-877-777-4778 (1-800-829-4059 for TTY/TDD users) or write to the Taxpayer Advocate at the IRS office that last contacted you.

### **VII. Appeals and Judicial Review**

If you disagree with us about the amount of your tax liability or certain collection actions, you have the right to ask the Appeals Office to review your case. You may also ask a court to review your case.

### **VIII. Relief From Certain Penalties and Interest**

The IRS will waive penalties when allowed by law if you can show you acted reasonably and in good faith or relied on the incorrect advice of an IRS employee. We will waive interest that is the result of certain errors or delays caused by an IRS employee.

# Examinations, Appeals, Collections, and Refunds

## Examinations (Audits)

We accept most taxpayer's returns as filed. If we inquire about your return or select it for examination, it does not suggest that you are dishonest. The inquiry or examination may or may not result in more tax. We may close your case without change; or, you may receive a refund.

The process of selecting a return for examination usually begins in one of two ways. First, we use computer programs to identify returns that may have incorrect amounts. These programs may be based on information returns, such as Forms 1099 and W-2, on studies of past examinations, or on certain issues identified by compliance projects. Second, we use information from outside sources that indicates that a return may have incorrect amounts. These sources may include newspapers, public records, and individuals. If we determine that the information is accurate and reliable, we may use it to select a return for examination.

Publication 556, *Examination of Returns, Appeal Rights, and Claims for Refund*, explains the rules and procedures that we follow in examinations. The following sections give an overview of how we conduct examinations.

### By Mail

We handle many examinations and inquiries by mail. We will send you a letter with either a request for more information or a reason why we believe a change to your return may be needed. You can respond by mail or you can request a personal interview with an examiner. If you mail us the requested information or provide an explanation, we may or may not agree with you, and we will explain the reasons for any changes. Please do not hesitate to write to us about anything you do not understand.

### By Interview

If we notify you that we will conduct your examination through a personal interview, or you request such an interview, you have the right to ask that the examination take place at a reasonable time and place that is convenient for both you and the IRS. If our examiner proposes any changes to your return, he or she will explain the reasons for the changes. If you do not

agree with these changes, you can meet with the examiner's supervisor.

## Repeat Examinations

If we examined your return for the same items in either of the 2 previous years and proposed no change to your tax liability, please contact us as soon as possible so we can see if we should discontinue the examination.

## Appeals

If you do not agree with the examiner's proposed changes, you can appeal them to the Appeals Office of IRS. Most differences can be settled without expensive and time-consuming court trials. Your appeal rights are explained in detail in both Publication 5, *Appeal Rights and Preparation of Protests for Unagreed Cases*, and Publication 556, *Examination of Returns, Appeal Rights, and Claims for Refund*.

If you do not wish to use the Appeals Office or disagree with its findings, you may be able to take your case to the U.S. Tax Court, U.S. Court of Federal Claims, or the U.S. District Court where you live. If you take your case to court, the IRS will have the burden of proving certain facts if you kept adequate records to show your tax liability, cooperated with the IRS, and meet certain other conditions. If the court agrees with you on most issues in your case, and finds that our position was largely unjustified, you may be able to recover some of your administrative and litigation costs. You will not be eligible to recover these costs unless you tried to resolve your case administratively, including going through the appeals system, and you gave us the information necessary to resolve the case.

## Collections

Publication 594, *The IRS Collection Process*, explains your rights and responsibilities regarding payment of federal taxes. It describes:

- What to do when you owe taxes. It describes what to do if you get a tax bill and what to do if you think your bill is wrong. It also covers making installment payments, delaying collection action, and submitting an offer in compromise.
- IRS collection actions. It covers liens, releasing a lien, levies, releasing a levy, seizures and sales, and release of property.

Publication 1660, *Collection Appeal Rights for Liens, Levies, Seizures, and Installment Agreement Terminations*, explains your collection appeal rights.

## Innocent Spouse Relief

Generally, both you and your spouse are responsible, jointly and individually, for paying the full amount of any tax, interest, or penalties due on your joint return. However, you may not have to pay the tax, interest, and penalties related to your spouse (or former spouse).

New tax law changes make it easier to qualify for innocent spouse relief and add two other ways for you to get relief. For more information, see Publication 971, *Innocent Spouse Relief*, and Form 8857, *Request for Innocent Spouse Relief (And Separation of Liability and Equitable Relief)*.

## Refunds

You may file a claim for refund if you think you paid too much tax. You must generally file the claim within 3 years from the date you filed your original return or 2 years from the date you paid the tax, whichever is later. The law generally provides for interest on your refund if it is not paid within 45 days of the date you filed your return or claim for refund. Publication 556, *Examination of Returns, Appeal Rights, and Claims for Refund*, has more information on refunds.

## Tax Information

The IRS provides a great deal of free information. The following are sources for forms, publications, and additional information.

- **Tax Questions: 1-800-829-1040** (1-800-829-4059 for TTY/TDD users)
- **Forms and Publications: 1-800-829-3676** (1-800-829-4059 for TTY/TDD users)
- **Internet: [www.irs.ustreas.gov](http://www.irs.ustreas.gov)**
- **TaxFax Service:** From your fax machine, dial **703-368-9694**.
- **Small Business Ombudsman:** If you are a small business entity, you can participate in the regulatory process and comment on enforcement actions of IRS by calling **1-888-REG-FAIR**.
- **Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration:** If you want to confidentially report misconduct, waste, fraud, or abuse by an IRS employee, you can call **1-800-366-4484** (1-800-877-8339 for TTY/TDD users). You can remain anonymous.