

## § 5.21

### § 5.21 What does a Treasury entity do upon receipt of a request to offset the salary of a Treasury entity employee to collect a debt owed by the employee to another Federal agency?

(a) *Notice to the Treasury employee.* When a Treasury entity receives proper certification of a debt owed by one of its employees, the Treasury entity will begin deductions from the employee's pay at the next officially established pay interval. The Treasury entity will send a written notice to the employee indicating that a certified debt claim has been received from the creditor agency, the amount of the debt claimed to be owed by the creditor agency, the date deductions from salary will begin, and the amount of such deductions.

(b) *Amount of deductions from Treasury employee's salary.* The amount deducted under § 5.20(b) of this part will be the lesser of the amount of the debt certified by the creditor agency or an amount up to 15% of the debtor's disposable pay. Deductions shall continue until the Treasury entity knows that the debt is paid in full or until otherwise instructed by the creditor agency. Alternatively, the amount offset may be an amount agreed upon, in writing, by the debtor and the creditor agency. See § 5.12(g) (salary offset process).

(c) *When the debtor is no longer employed by the Treasury entity—(1) Offset of final and subsequent payments.* If a Treasury entity employee retires or resigns or if his or her employment ends before collection of the debt is complete, the Treasury entity will continue to offset, under 31 U.S.C. 3716, up to 100% of an employee's subsequent payments until the debt is paid or otherwise resolved. Such payments include a debtor's final salary payment, lump-sum leave payment, and other payments payable to the debtor by the Treasury entity. See 31 U.S.C. 3716 and 5 CFR 550.1104(1) and 550.1104(m).

(2) *Notice to the creditor agency.* If the employee is separated from the Treasury entity before the debt is paid in full, the Treasury entity will certify to the creditor agency the total amount of its collection. If the Treasury entity is aware that the employee is entitled to payments from the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund, Federal

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Employee Retirement System, or other similar payments, the Treasury entity will provide written notice to the agency making such payments that the debtor owes a debt (including the amount) and that the provisions of 5 CFR 550.1109 have been fully complied with. The creditor agency is responsible for submitting a certified claim to the agency responsible for making such payments before collection may begin. Generally, creditor agencies will collect such monies through the Treasury Offset Program as described in § 5.9(c) of this part.

(3) *Notice to the debtor.* The Treasury entity will provide to the debtor a copy of any notices sent to the creditor agency under paragraph (c)(2) of this section.

(d) *When the debtor transfers to another Federal agency—(1) Notice to the creditor agency.* If the debtor transfers to another Federal agency before the debt is paid in full, the Treasury entity will notify the creditor agency and will certify the total amount of its collection on the debt. The Treasury entity will provide a copy of the certification to the creditor agency. The creditor agency is responsible for submitting a certified claim to the debtor's new employing agency before collection may begin.

(2) *Notice to the debtor.* The Treasury entity will provide to the debtor a copy of any notices and certifications sent to the creditor agency under paragraph (d)(1) of this section.

(e) *Request for hearing official.* A Treasury entity will provide a hearing official upon the creditor agency's request with respect to a Treasury entity employee. See 5 CFR 550.1107(a).

### APPENDIX A TO PART 5—TREASURY DIRECTIVE 34-01—WAIVING CLAIMS AGAINST TREASURY EMPLOYEES FOR ERRONEOUS PAYMENTS

#### TREASURY DIRECTIVE 34-01

*Date:* July 12, 2000.

*Sunset Review:* July 12, 2004.

*Subject:* Waiving Claims Against Treasury Employees for Erroneous Payments.

#### 1. Purpose

This Directive establishes the Department of the Treasury's policies and procedures for waiving claims by the Government against

an employee for erroneous payments of: (1) Pay and allowances (*e.g.*, health and life insurance) and (2) travel, transportation, and relocation expenses and allowances.

*2. Background*

a. 5 U.S.C. §5584 authorizes the waiver of claims by the United States in whole or in part against an employee arising out of erroneous payments of pay and allowances, travel, transportation, and relocation expenses and allowances. A waiver may be considered when collection of the claim would be against equity and good conscience and not in the best interest of the United States provided that there does not exist, in connection with the claim, an indication of fraud, misrepresentation, fault, or lack of good faith on the part of the employee or any other person having an interest in obtaining a waiver of the claim.

b. The General Accounting Office Act of 1996 (Pub. L. 104-316), Title I, §103(d), enacted October 19, 1996, amended 5 U.S.C. §5584 by transferring the authority to waive claims for erroneous payments exceeding \$1,500 from the Comptroller General of the United States to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). OMB subsequently re delegated this waiver authority to the executive agency that made the erroneous payment. The authority to waive claims not exceeding \$1,500, which was vested in the head of each agency prior to the enactment of Pub. L. 104-316, was unaffected by the Act.

c. 5 U.S.C. §5514 authorizes the head of each agency, upon a determination that an employee is indebted to the United States for debts to which the United States is entitled to be repaid at the time of the determination, to deduct up to 15%, or a greater amount if agreed to by the employee, from the employee's pay at officially established pay intervals in order to repay the debt.

*3. Delegation*

a. The Deputy Assistant Secretary (Administration), the heads of bureaus, the Inspector General, and the Inspector General for Tax Administration are delegated the authority to waive, in whole or in part, a claim of the United States against an employee for an erroneous payment of pay and allowances, travel, transportation, and relocation expenses and allowances, aggregating less than \$5,000 per claim, in accordance with the limitations and standards in 5 U.S.C. §5584.

b. Treasury's Deputy Chief Financial Officer is delegated the authority to waive, in whole or in part, a claim of the United States against an employee for an erroneous payment of pay and allowances, travel, transportation, and relocation expenses and allowances, aggregating \$5,000 or more per claim, in accordance with the limitations and standards in 5 U.S.C. §5584.

*4. Appeals*

a. Requests for waiver of claims aggregating less than \$5,000 per claim which are denied in whole or in part may be appealed to the Deputy Chief Financial Officer for the Department of the Treasury.

b. Requests for waiver of claims aggregating \$5,000 or more per claim which are denied in whole or in part may be appealed to the Assistant Secretary (Management)/Chief Financial Officer.

*5. Redlegation*

The Deputy Assistant Secretary (Administration), the heads of bureaus, the Inspector General, and the Inspector General for Tax Administration may redelegate their respective authority and responsibility in writing no lower than the bureau deputy chief financial officer unless authorized by Treasury's Deputy Chief Financial Officer. Copies of each redelegation shall be submitted to the Department's Deputy Chief Financial Officer.

*6. Responsibilities*

a. The Deputy Assistant Secretary (Administration), the heads of bureaus, the Inspector General, and the Inspector General for Tax Administration shall:

(1) Promptly notify an employee upon discovery of an erroneous payment to that employee;

(2) Promptly act to collect the erroneous overpayment, following established debt collection policies and procedures;

(3) Establish time frames for employees to request a waiver in writing and for the bureau to review the waiver request. These time frames must take into consideration the responsibilities of the United States to take prompt action to pursue enforced collection on overdue debts, which may arise from erroneous payments.

(4) Notify employees whose requests for waiver of claims aggregating less than \$5,000 per claim are denied in whole or in part of the basis for the denial and the right to appeal the denial to the Deputy Chief Financial Officer of the Department of the Treasury. All such appeals shall:

(a) Be made in writing;

(b) Specify the basis for the appeal;

(c) Include a chronology of the events surrounding the erroneous payments;

(d) Include a statement regarding any mitigating factors; and

(e) Be submitted to the official who denied the waiver request no later than 60 days from receipt by the employee of written notice of the denial of the waiver; and

(f) Attach at least the following documents: the employee's original request for a waiver; the bureau's denial of the request;

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any personnel actions, *e.g.*, promotions, demotions, step increases, etc. that relate to the overpayment.

(5) Forward to Treasury's Deputy Chief Financial Officer the appeal and supporting documentation, the bureau's recommendation as to why the appeal should be approved or denied; and a statement as to the action taken by the bureau to avoid a recurrence of the error.

(6) Pay a refund when appropriate if a waiver is granted;

(7) Fulfill all labor relations responsibilities when implementing this directive; and

(8) Fulfill any other responsibility of the agency imposed by 5 U.S.C. §5584, or other applicable laws and regulations.

b. Treasury's Deputy Chief Financial Officer shall advise employees whose requests for waiver of claims aggregating \$5,000 or more per claim are denied in whole or in part of the basis for the denial and the right to appeal the denial to the Assistant Secretary (Management)/Chief Financial Officer. All such appeals shall be in the format and contain the information and documentation described in subsection 6.a.(4), above. The Deputy Chief Financial Officer shall forward to Assistant Secretary (Management)/Chief Financial Officer the appeal and supporting documentation, his/her recommendation as to why the appeal should be approved or denied, and a statement obtained from the bureau from which the claim arose as to the action taken by the bureau to avoid a recurrence of the error.

### 7. Reporting Requirements

a. Each bureau, the Deputy Assistant Secretary (Administration) for Departmental Offices, the Inspector General, and the Inspector General for Tax Administration shall maintain a register of waiver actions subject to Departmental review. The register shall cover each fiscal year and be prepared by December 31 of each year for the preceding fiscal year. The register shall contain the following information:

(1) The total amount waived by the bureau;

(2) The number and dollar amount of waiver applications granted in full;

(3) The number and dollar amount of waiver applications granted in part and denied in part, and the dollar amount of each;

(4) The number and dollar amount of waiver applications denied in their entirety;

(5) The number of waiver applications referred to the Deputy Chief Financial Officer for initial action or for appeal;

(6) The dollar amount refunded as a result of waiver action by the bureau; and

(7) The dollar amount refunded as a result of waiver action by the Deputy Chief Financial Officer or the Assistant Secretary (Management)/Chief Financial Officer.

b. Each bureau, the Deputy Assistant Secretary (Administration) for Departmental

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Offices, the Inspector General, and the Inspector General for Tax Administration shall retain a written record of each waiver action for 6 years and 3 months. At a minimum, the written record shall contain:

(1) The bureau's summary of the events surrounding the erroneous payment;

(2) Any written comments submitted by the employee from whom collection is sought;

(3) An account of the waiver action taken and the reasons for such action; and

(4) Other pertinent information such as any action taken to refund amounts repaid.

### 8. Effect of Request for Waiver

A request for a waiver of a claim shall not affect an employee's opportunity under 5 U.S.C. §5514(a)(2)(D) for a hearing on the determination of the agency concerning the existence or the amount of the debt, or the terms of the repayment schedule. A request by an employee for a hearing under 5 U.S.C. §5514(a)(2)(D) shall not affect an employee's right to request a waiver of the claim. The determination whether to waive a claim may be made at the discretion of the deciding official either before or after a final decision is rendered pursuant to 5 U.S.C. §5514(a)(2)(D) concerning the existence or the amount of the debt, or the terms of the repayment schedule.

### 9. Guidelines for Determining Requests

a. A request for a waiver shall *not* be granted if the deciding official determines there exists, in connection with the claim, an indication of fraud, misrepresentation, fault, or lack of good faith on the part of the employee or any other person having an interest in obtaining a waiver of the claim. There are no exceptions to this rule for financial hardship or otherwise.

(1) "Fault" exists if, in light of all the circumstances, it is determined that the employee knew or should have known that an error existed, but failed to take action to have it corrected. Fault can derive from an act or a failure to act. Unlike fraud, fault does not require a deliberate intent to deceive. Whether an employee should have known about an error in pay is determined from the perspective of a reasonable person. Pertinent considerations in finding fault include whether:

(a) The payment resulted from the employee's incorrect, but not fraudulent, statement that the employee should have known was incorrect;

(b) The payment resulted from the employee's failure to disclose material facts in the employee's possession which the employee should have known to be material; or

(c) The employee accepted a payment, which the employee knew or should have known to be erroneous.

(2) Every case must be examined in light of its particular facts. For example, where an employee is promoted to a higher grade but the step level for the employee's new grade is miscalculated, it may be appropriate to conclude that there is no fault on the employee's part because employees are not typically expected to be aware of and understand the rules regarding determination of step level upon promotion. On the other hand, a different conclusion as to fault potentially may be reached if the employee in question is a personnel specialist or an attorney who concentrates on personnel law.

b. If the deciding official finds an indication of fraud, misrepresentation, fault, or lack of good faith on the part of the employee or any other person having an interest in obtaining a waiver of the claim, then the request for a waiver must be denied.

c. If the deciding official finds no indication of fraud, misrepresentation, fault, or lack of good faith on the part of the employee or any other person having an interest in obtaining a waiver of the claim, the employee is *not* automatically entitled to a waiver. Before a waiver can be granted, the deciding official must also determine that collection of the claim against an employee would be against equity and good conscience and not in the best interests of the United States. Factors to consider when determining if collection of a claim against an employee would be against equity and good conscience and not in the best interests of the United States include, but are not limited to:

(1) Whether collection of the claim would cause serious financial hardship to the employee from whom collection is sought.

(2) Whether, because of the erroneous payment, the employee either has relinquished a valuable right or changed positions for the worse, regardless of the employee's financial circumstances.

(a) To establish that a valuable right has been relinquished, it must be shown that the right was, in fact, valuable; that it cannot be regained; and that the action was based chiefly or solely on reliance on the overpayment.

(b) To establish that the employee's position has changed for the worse, it must be shown that the decision would not have been made but for the overpayment, and that the decision resulted in a loss.

(c) An example of a "detrimental reliance" would be a decision to sign a lease for a more expensive apartment based chiefly or solely upon reliance on an erroneous calculation of salary, and the funds spent for rent cannot be recovered.

(3) The cost of collecting the claim equals or exceeds the amount of the claim;

(4) The time elapsed between the erroneous payment and discovery of the error and notification of the employee;

(5) Whether failure to make restitution would result in unfair gain to the employee;

(6) Whether recovery of the claim would be unconscionable under the circumstances.

d. The burden is on the employee to demonstrate that collection of the claim would be against equity and good conscience and not in the best interest of the United States.

#### 10. Authorities

a. 5 U.S.C. §5584, "Claims for Overpayment of Pay and Allowances, and of Travel, Transportation and Relocation Expenses and Allowances."

b. 31 U.S.C. §3711, "Collection and Compromise."

c. 31 U.S.C. §3716, "Administrative Offset."

d. 31 U.S.C. §3717, "Interest and Penalty on Claims."

e. 5 CFR Part 550, subpart K, "Collection by Offset from Indebted Government Employees."

f. 31 CFR Part 5, subpart B, "Salary Offset."

g. Determination with Respect to Transfer of Functions Pursuant to Public Law 104-316, OMB, December 17, 1996.

#### 11. Cancellation

TD 34-01, "Waiver of Claims for Erroneous Payments," dated October 25, 1995, is superseded.

#### 12. Office of Primary Interest

Office of Accounting and Internal Control.

## PART 6—APPLICATIONS FOR AWARDS UNDER THE EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE ACT

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