

§ 33.5

§ 33.5 Review of department records relating to the debt.

(a) To inspect or copy Department records relating to the debt, the employee must send a written request to the Department official or office designated in the notice of intent to offset stating his or her intention. The written request must be received by the Department within 15 days from the employee's receipt of the notice.

(b) In response to a timely request as described in paragraph (a) of this section, the designated Department official shall notify the employee of the location and time when the employee may inspect and copy such records. If the employee or employee's representative is unable to personally inspect such records as the result of geographical or other constraints, the Department shall arrange to send copies of such records to the employee.

§ 33.6 Hearings.

(a) *Petitions for hearing.* (1) To request a hearing concerning the existence or amount of the debt or the offset schedule established by the Department, the employee must send a written petition to the office designated in the notice of intent to offset, see § 33.4(a)(10), within 15 days of receipt of the notice.

(2) The petition must:

(i) Be signed by the employee;

(ii) Fully identify and explain with reasonable specificity all the facts, evidence, and witnesses, if any, that the employee believes support his or her position; and

(iii) Specify whether an oral or paper hearing is requested. If an oral hearing is requested, the request should explain why the matter cannot be resolved by review of the documentary evidence alone.

(3) The timely filing of a petition for hearing shall stay any further collection proceedings.

(b) *Failure to timely request.* (1) If the petition for hearing is filed after the 15-day period provided for in paragraph (a)(1) of this section, the Secretary may grant the request if the employee can establish that the delay was the result of circumstances beyond the employee's control, or that the employee failed to receive actual notice of the filing deadline.

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(2) An employee waives the right to a hearing, and will have his or her disposable pay offset in accordance with the offset schedule established by the Department, if the employee:

(i) Fails to file a timely request for a hearing, unless such failure is excused; or

(ii) Fails to appear at an oral hearing, of which the employee was notified, unless the hearing official determines that the failure to appear was due to circumstances beyond the employee's control.

(c) *Form of hearings.* (1) General. After the employee requests a hearing, the hearing official shall notify the employee of the form of the hearing to be provided. If the hearing will be oral, the notice shall set forth the date, time, and location of the hearing. If the hearing will be a review of the written record, the employee shall be notified that he or she should submit evidence and arguments in writing to the hearing official by a specified date, after which the record shall be closed. The date specified shall give the employee reasonable time to submit documentation.

(2) *Oral hearing.* An employee who requests an oral hearing shall be provided an oral hearing if the hearing official determines that the matter cannot be resolved by review of documentary evidence alone because an issue of credibility or veracity is involved. Where an oral hearing is appropriate, the hearing is not an adversarial adjudication and need not take the form of an evidentiary hearing, i.e., the rules of evidence need not apply. *Oral hearings may take the form of, but are not limited to:*

(i) Informal conferences with the hearing official in which the employee and agency representative will be given full opportunity to present evidence, witnesses, and arguments;

(ii) Informal meetings in which the hearing official interviews the employee; or

(iii) Formal written submissions with an opportunity for oral presentations.

(3) *Paper hearing.* If the hearing official determines that an oral hearing is not necessary, the hearing official will make the determination based upon a review of the available written record.

(4) *Record.* The hearing official shall maintain a summary record of any hearing conducted under this part. Witnesses who testify in oral hearings will do so under oath or affirmation.

(d) *Written decision.* (1) Date of decision. The hearing officer shall issue a written opinion stating his or her decision, based upon documentary evidence and information developed at the hearing, as soon as practicable after the hearing, but not later than sixty (60) days after the date on which the hearing petition was received by the creditor agency, unless the employee requested a delay in the proceedings, in which case the 60-day decision period shall be extended by the number of days by which the hearing was postponed. The recipient of an employee's request for a hearing must forward the request expeditiously to the Departmental Appeals Board so as to not jeopardize the Board's ability to issue a decision within this 60-day period.

(2) *Content of decision.* The written decision shall include:

(i) A statement of the facts presented to support the origin, nature, and amount of the debt;

(ii) The hearing official's findings, analysis, and conclusions, including a determination whether the employee's petition for hearing was baseless and resulted from an intent to delay creditor agency collection activity; and

(iii) The terms of any repayment schedule, if applicable.

(e) *Failure to appear.* In the absence of good cause shown, an employee who fails to appear at a hearing shall be deemed, for the purpose of this part, to admit the existence and amount of the debt as described in the notice of intent. If the representative of the creditor agency fails to appear, the hearing official shall proceed with the hearing as scheduled and make a determination based upon oral testimony presented and the documentary evidence submitted by both parties. With the agreement of both parties, the hearing official shall schedule a new hearing date, and both parties shall be given reasonable notice of the time and place of the new hearing.

§ 33.7 Obtaining the services of a hearing official.

(a)(1) When the Department is the creditor agency, the office designated in § 33.4(a)(10) shall schedule a hearing, if one is requested by an employee, before a hearing official.

(2) When the Department cannot provide a prompt and appropriate hearing before an administrative law judge or a hearing official furnished pursuant to another lawful arrangement, the office designated in § 33.4(a)(10) may:

(i) When the debtor is not an employee of the Department, contact an agent of the employee's paying agency designated in 5 CFR part 581, Appendix A, to arrange for a hearing official; or

(ii) When the debtor is an employee of the Department, contact an agent of any agency designated in 5 CFR part 581, Appendix A, to arrange for a hearing official.

(b)(1) When another agency is the creditor agency, it is the responsibility of that agency to arrange for a hearing if one is requested. The Department will provide a hearing official upon the request of a creditor agency when the debtor is employed by the Department and the creditor agency cannot provide a prompt and appropriate hearing before a hearing official furnished pursuant to another lawful arrangement.

(2) Services rendered to a creditor agency under paragraph (b)(1) of this section will be provided on a fully reimbursable basis pursuant to the Economy Act of 1932, as amended, 31 U.S.C. 1535.

(c) The determination of a hearing official designated under this section is considered to be an official certification regarding the existence and amount of the debt for purposes of executing salary offset under 5 U.S.C. 5514 and this part. A creditor agency may make a certification to the Secretary of the Treasury under 5 CFR 550.1108 or a paying agency under 5 CFR 550.1109 regarding the existence and amount of the debt based on the certification of a hearing official. If a hearing official determines that a debt may not be collected via salary offset, but the creditor agency finds that the debt is still valid, the creditor agency may still seek collection of the debt through