

the question of the indebtedness cannot be resolved by review of the documentary evidence, for example, when the validity of the debt turns on an issue of credibility or veracity. Unless otherwise required by law, an oral hearing under this section is not required to be a formal evidentiary hearing, although Treasury entities should carefully document all significant matters discussed at the hearing. Treasury entities may suspend collection through administrative offset and/or other collection actions pending the resolution of a debtor's dispute. Each Treasury entity will have its own policies and procedures concerning the administrative review process consistent with the FCCS and the regulations in this section.

(d) *Procedures for expedited offset.* Under the circumstances described in 31 CFR 901.3(b)(4)(iii), Treasury entities may effect an offset against a payment to be made to the debtor prior to sending a notice to the debtor, as described in § 5.4 of this part, or completing the procedures described in paragraph (b)(2) and (c) of this section. Treasury entities shall give the debtor notice and an opportunity for review as soon as practicable and promptly refund any money ultimately found not to have been owed to the Government.

**§ 5.11 How will Treasury entities use tax refund offset to collect a Treasury debt?**

(a) *Tax refund offset.* In most cases, the Financial Management Service uses the Treasury Offset Program to collect Treasury debts by the offset of tax refunds and other Federal payments. See § 5.9(c) of this part. If not already transferred to the Financial Management Service under § 5.9 of this part, Treasury entities will refer to the Treasury Offset Program any past-due, legally enforceable debt for collection by tax refund offset. See 26 U.S.C. 6402(d), 31 U.S.C. 3720A and 31 CFR 285.2.

(b) *Notice.* At least sixty (60) days prior to referring a debt to the Treasury Offset Program, Treasury entities will send notice to the debtor in accordance with the requirements of § 5.4 of this part. Treasury entities will certify to the Financial Management

Service's Treasury Offset Program, in writing, that the debt is past-due and legally enforceable in the amount submitted and that the Treasury entities have made reasonable efforts to obtain payment of the debt as described in 31 CFR 285.2(d). In addition, Treasury entities will certify their compliance with all applicable due process and other requirements described in this part and other Federal laws. See 31 U.S.C. 3720A(b) and 31 CFR 285.2.

(c) *Administrative review.* The notice described in § 5.4 of this part shall provide the debtor with at least 60 days prior to the initiation of tax refund offset to request an administrative review as described in § 5.10(c) of this part. Treasury entities may suspend collection through tax refund offset and/or other collection actions pending the resolution of the debtor's dispute.

**§ 5.12 How will Treasury entities offset a Federal employee's salary to collect a Treasury debt?**

(a) *Federal salary offset.* (1) Salary offset is used to collect debts owed to the United States by Treasury Department and other Federal employees. If a Federal employee owes a Treasury debt, Treasury entities may offset the employee's Federal salary to collect the debt in the manner described in this section. For information on how a Federal agency other than a Treasury entity may collect debt from the salary of a Treasury Department employee, see §§ 5.20 and 5.21, subpart C, of this part.

(2) Nothing in this part requires a Treasury entity to collect a Treasury debt in accordance with the provisions of this section if Federal law allows otherwise. See, for example, 5 U.S.C. 5705 (travel advances not used for allowable travel expenses are recoverable from the employee or his estate by setoff against accrued pay and other means) and 5 U.S.C. 4108 (recovery of training expenses).

(3) Treasury entities may use the administrative wage garnishment procedure described in § 5.13 of this part to collect a debt from an individual's non-Federal wages.

(b) *Centralized salary offset through the Treasury Offset Program.* As described in § 5.9(a) of this part, Treasury entities

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will refer Treasury debts to the Financial Management Service for collection by administrative offset, including salary offset, through the Treasury Offset Program. When possible, Treasury entities should attempt salary offset through the Treasury Offset Program before applying the procedures in paragraph (c) of this section. See 5 CFR 550.1109.

(c) *Non-centralized salary offset for Treasury debts.* When centralized salary offset through the Treasury Offset Program is not available or appropriate, Treasury entities may collect delinquent Treasury debts through non-centralized salary offset. See 5 CFR 550.1109. In these cases, Treasury entities may offset a payment internally or make a request directly to a Federal payment agency to offset a salary payment to collect a delinquent debt owed by a Federal employee. If the Federal payment agency is another Treasury entity, the Treasury entity making the request shall do so through the Deputy Chief Financial Officer as described in § 5.20(c) of this part. At least thirty (30) days prior to offsetting internally or requesting a Federal agency to offset a salary payment, Treasury entities will send notice to the debtor in accordance with the requirements of § 5.4 of this part. When referring a debt for offset, Treasury entities will certify to the payment agency, in writing, that the debt is valid, delinquent and legally enforceable in the amount stated, and there are no legal bars to collection by salary offset. In addition, Treasury entities will certify that all due process and other prerequisites to salary offset have been met. See 5 U.S.C. 5514, 31 U.S.C. 3716(a), and this section for a description of the due process and other prerequisites for salary offset.

(d) *When prior notice not required.* Treasury entities are not required to provide prior notice to an employee when the following adjustments are made by a Treasury entity to a Treasury employee's pay:

(1) Any adjustment to pay arising out of any employee's election of coverage or a change in coverage under a Federal benefits program requiring periodic deductions from pay, if the amount to be recovered was accumulated over four pay periods or less;

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(2) A routine intra-agency adjustment of pay that is made to correct an overpayment of pay attributable to clerical or administrative errors or delays in processing pay documents, if the overpayment occurred within the four pay periods preceding the adjustment, and, at the time of such adjustment, or as soon thereafter as practical, the individual is provided written notice of the nature and the amount of the adjustment and point of contact for contesting such adjustment; or

(3) Any adjustment to collect a debt amounting to \$50 or less, if, at the time of such adjustment, or as soon thereafter as practical, the individual is provided written notice of the nature and the amount of the adjustment and a point of contact for contesting such adjustment.

(e) *Hearing procedures—(1) Request for a hearing.* A Federal employee who has received a notice that his or her Treasury debt will be collected by means of salary offset may request a hearing concerning the existence or amount of the debt. The Federal employee also may request a hearing concerning the amount proposed to be deducted from the employee's pay each pay period. The employee must send any request for hearing, in writing, to the office designated in the notice described in § 5.4. See § 5.4(a)(11). The request must be received by the designated office on or before the 15th calendar day following the employee's receipt of the notice. The employee must sign the request and specify whether an oral or paper hearing is requested. If an oral hearing is requested, the employee must explain why the matter cannot be resolved by review of the documentary evidence alone. All travel expenses incurred by the Federal employee in connection with an in-person hearing will be borne by the employee.

(2) *Failure to submit timely request for hearing.* If the employee fails to submit a request for hearing within the time period described in paragraph (e)(1) of this section, the employee will have waived the right to a hearing, and salary offset may be initiated. However, Treasury entities should accept a late request for hearing if the employee can

show that the late request was the result of circumstances beyond the employee's control or because of a failure to receive actual notice of the filing deadline.

(3) *Hearing official.* Treasury entities must obtain the services of a hearing official who is not under the supervision or control of the Secretary. Treasury entities may contact the Deputy Chief Financial Officer as described in § 5.20(c) of this part or an agent of any agency designated in Appendix A to 5 CFR part 581 (List of Agents Designated to Accept Legal Process) to request a hearing official.

(4) *Notice of hearing.* After the employee requests a hearing, the designated hearing official shall inform the employee of the form of the hearing to be provided. For oral hearings, the notice shall set forth the date, time and location of the hearing. For paper hearings, the notice shall notify the employee of the date by which he or she should submit written arguments to the designated hearing official. The hearing official shall give the employee reasonable time to submit documentation in support of the employee's position. The hearing official shall schedule a new hearing date if requested by both parties. The hearing official shall give both parties reasonable notice of the time and place of a rescheduled hearing.

(5) *Oral hearing.* The hearing official will conduct an oral hearing if he or she determines that the matter cannot be resolved by review of documentary evidence alone (for example, when an issue of credibility or veracity is involved). The hearing need not take the form of an evidentiary hearing, but may be conducted in a manner determined by the hearing official, including but 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 argument;

(ii) Informal meetings with an interview of the employee by the hearing official; or

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

(6) *Paper hearing.* If the hearing official determines that an oral hearing is not necessary, he or she will make the determination based upon a review of the available written record, including any documentation submitted by the employee in support of his or her position.

(7) *Failure to appear or submit documentary evidence.* In the absence of good cause shown (for example, excused illness), if the employee fails to appear at an oral hearing or fails to submit documentary evidence as required for a paper hearing, the employee will have waived the right to a hearing, and salary offset may be initiated. Further, the employee will have been deemed to admit the existence and amount of the debt as described in the notice of intent to offset. If the Treasury entity representative fails to appear at an oral hearing, the hearing official shall proceed with the hearing as scheduled, and make his or her determination based upon the oral testimony presented and the documentary evidence submitted by both parties.

(8) *Burden of proof.* Treasury entities will have the initial burden to prove the existence and amount of the debt. Thereafter, if the employee disputes the existence or amount of the debt, the employee must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that no debt exists or that the amount of the debt is incorrect. In addition, the employee may present evidence that the proposed terms of the repayment schedule are unlawful, would cause a financial hardship to the employee, or that collection of the debt may not be pursued due to operation of law.

(9) *Record.* The hearing official shall maintain a summary record of any hearing provided by this part. Witnesses will testify under oath or affirmation in oral hearings.

(10) *Date of decision.* The hearing official 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 60 days after the date on which the request for hearing was received by the Treasury entity. If the employee requests a delay in the proceedings, the

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deadline for the decision may be postponed by the number of days by which the hearing was postponed. When a decision is not timely rendered, the Treasury entity shall waive penalties applied to the debt for the period beginning with the date the decision is due and ending on the date the decision is issued.

(1) *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; and

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

(12) *Final agency action.* The hearing official's decision shall be final.

(f) Waiver not precluded. Nothing in this part precludes an employee from requesting waiver of an overpayment under 5 U.S.C. 5584 or 8346(b), 10 U.S.C. 2774, 32 U.S.C. 716, or other statutory authority.

(g) *Salary offset process*—(1) *Determination of disposable pay.* The office of the Deputy Chief Financial Officer will consult with the appropriate Treasury entity payroll office to determine the amount of a Treasury Department employee's disposable pay (as defined in §5.1 of this part) and will implement salary offset when requested to do so by a Treasury entity, as described in paragraph (c) of this section, or another agency, as described in §5.20 of this part. If the debtor is not employed by the Treasury Department, the agency employing the debtor will determine the amount of the employee's disposable pay and will implement salary offset upon request.

(2) *When salary offset begins.* Deductions shall begin within three official pay periods following receipt of the creditor agency's request for offset.

(3) *Amount of salary offset.* The amount to be offset from each salary payment will be up to 15 percent of a debtor's disposable pay, as follows:

(i) If the amount of the debt is equal to or less than 15 percent of the disposable pay, such debt generally will be collected in one lump sum payment;

(ii) Installment deductions will be made over a period of no greater than the anticipated period of employment.

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An installment deduction will not exceed 15 percent of the disposable pay from which the deduction is made unless the employee has agreed in writing to the deduction of a greater amount or the creditor agency has determined that smaller deductions are appropriate based on the employee's ability to pay.

(4) *Final salary payment.* After the employee has separated either voluntarily or involuntarily from the payment agency, the payment agency may make a lump sum deduction exceeding 15 percent of disposable pay from any final salary or other payments pursuant to 31 U.S.C. 3716 in order to satisfy a debt.

(h) *Payment agency's responsibilities.*

(1) As required by 5 CFR 550.1109, if the employee separates from the payment agency from which a Treasury entity has requested salary offset, the payment agency must certify the total amount of its collection and notify the Treasury entity and the employee of the amounts collected. If the payment agency is aware that the employee is entitled to payments from the Civil Service Retirement Fund and Disability Fund, the Federal Employee Retirement System, or other similar payments, it must provide written notification to the payment agency responsible for making such payments that the debtor owes a debt, the amount of the debt, and that the Treasury entity has complied with the provisions of this section. Treasury entities must submit a properly certified claim to the new payment agency before the collection can be made.

(2) If the employee is already separated from employment and all payments due from his or her former payment agency have been made, Treasury entities may request that money due and payable to the employee from the Civil Service Retirement Fund and Disability Fund, the Federal Employee Retirement System, or other similar funds, be administratively offset to collect the debt. Generally, Treasury entities will collect such monies through the Treasury Offset Program as described in §5.9(c) of this part.

(3) When an employee transfers to another agency, Treasury entities should resume collection with the employee's

new payment agency in order to continue salary offset.

**§ 5.13 How will Treasury entities use administrative wage garnishment to collect a Treasury debt from a debtor's wages?**

(a) Treasury entities are authorized to collect debts from a debtor's wages by means of administrative wage garnishment in accordance with the requirements of 31 U.S.C. 3720D and 31 CFR 285.11. This part adopts and incorporates all of the provisions of 31 CFR 285.11 concerning administrative wage garnishment, including the hearing procedures described in 31 CFR 285.11(f). Treasury entities may use administrative wage garnishment to collect a delinquent Treasury debt unless the debtor is making timely payments under an agreement to pay the debt in installments (see § 5.6 of this part). At least thirty (30) days prior to initiating an administrative wage garnishment, Treasury entities will send notice to the debtor in accordance with the requirements of § 5.4 of this part, including the requirements of § 5.4(a)(10) of this part. For Treasury debts referred to the Financial Management Service under § 5.9 of this part, Treasury entities may authorize the Financial Management Service to send a notice informing the debtor that administrative wage garnishment will be initiated and how the debtor may request a hearing as described in § 5.4(a)(10) of this part. If a debtor makes a timely request for a hearing, administrative wage garnishment will not begin until a hearing is held and a decision is sent to the debtor. See 31 CFR 285.11(f)(4). If a debtor's hearing request is not timely, Treasury entities may suspend collection by administrative wage garnishment in accordance with the provisions of 31 CFR 285.11(f)(5). All travel expenses incurred by the debtor in connection with an in-person hearing will be borne by the debtor.

(b) This section does not apply to Federal salary offset, the process by which Treasury entities collect debts from the salaries of Federal employees (see § 5.12 of this part).

**§ 5.14 How will Treasury entities report Treasury debts to credit bureaus?**

Treasury entities shall report delinquent Treasury debts to credit bureaus in accordance with the provisions of 31 U.S.C. 3711(e), 31 CFR 901.4, and the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-129, "Policies for Federal Credit Programs and Nontax Receivables." For additional information, see Financial Management Service's "Guide to the Federal Credit Bureau Program," which may be found at <http://www.fms.treas.gov/debt>. At least sixty (60) days prior to reporting a delinquent debt to a consumer reporting agency, Treasury entities will send notice to the debtor in accordance with the requirements of § 5.4 of this part. Treasury entities may authorize the Financial Management Service to report to credit bureaus those delinquent Treasury debts that have been transferred to the Financial Management Service under § 5.9 of this part.

**§ 5.15 How will Treasury entities refer Treasury debts to private collection agencies?**

Treasury entities will transfer delinquent Treasury debts to the Financial Management Service to obtain debt collection services provided by private collection agencies. See § 5.9 of this part.

**§ 5.16 When will Treasury entities refer Treasury debts to the Department of Justice?**

(a) *Compromise or suspension or termination of collection activity.* Treasury entities shall refer Treasury debts having a principal balance over \$100,000, or such higher amount as authorized by the Attorney General, to the Department of Justice for approval of any compromise of a debt or suspension or termination of collection activity. See §§ 5.7 and 5.8 of this part; 31 CFR 902.1; 31 CFR 903.1.

(b) *Litigation.* Treasury entities shall promptly refer to the Department of Justice for litigation delinquent Treasury debts on which aggressive collection activity has been taken in accordance with this part and that should not be compromised, and on which collection activity should not be suspended