

(b) *Review.* Upon the timely submission of evidence by the debtor, the Department shall review the dispute and shall consider its records and any documentation and evidence submitted by the debtor. The Department shall make a determination based on the review of the written record, and shall send a written notice of its decision to the debtor. There is no administrative appeal of this decision.

(c) A debt that previously has been reviewed pursuant to this part, or that has been reduced to a judgment, will not be reconsidered under this part unless the evidence presented by the debtor disputes payments made or events occurring subsequent to the previous review or judgment.

PART 32—ADMINISTRATIVE WAGE GARNISHMENT

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AUTHORITY: 31 U.S.C. 3720D, 5 U.S.C. 552, 553, E.O. 12866, 12988, 13808.

SOURCE: 68 FR 15093, Mar. 28, 2003, unless otherwise noted.

§ 32.1 Purpose and scope.

(a) *Purpose.* This part prescribes the standards and procedures for the Department to collect money from a debtor's disposable pay by means of administrative wage garnishment to satisfy delinquent non-tax debts owed to the United States.

(b) *Authority.* These standards and procedures are authorized under the wage garnishment provisions of the Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996, codified at 31 U.S.C. 3720D, and the Department of the Treasury Administrative Wage Garnishment Regulations at 31 CFR 285.11.

(c) *Scope.* (1) This part applies to all Departmental Operating Divisions and Regional Offices that administer a pro-

gram that gives rise to a delinquent non-tax debt owed to the United States and to all officers or employees of the Department authorized to collect such debt.

(2) This part shall apply notwithstanding any provision of State law.

(3) Nothing in this part precludes the compromise of a debt or the suspension or termination of collection action in accordance with part 30 of this title, or other applicable law or regulation.

(4) The receipt of payments pursuant to this part does not preclude the Department from pursuing other debt collection remedies, including the offset of Federal payments to satisfy delinquent non-tax debt owed to the United States. The Department may pursue such debt collection remedies separately or in conjunction with administrative wage garnishment.

(5) This part does not apply to the collection of delinquent non-tax debts owed to the United States from the wages of Federal employees from their Federal employment. Federal pay is subject to the Federal salary offset procedures set forth in 5 U.S.C. 5514 and other applicable laws.

(6) Nothing in this part requires the Department to duplicate notices or administrative proceedings required by contract or other laws or regulations.

§ 32.2 Definitions.

In this part, unless the context otherwise requires:

Business day means Monday through Friday. For purposes of computation, the last day of the period will be included unless it is a Federal legal holiday, in which case the next business day following the holiday will be considered the last day of the period.

Certificate of service means a certificate signed by an employee of the Department indicating the nature of the document to which it pertains, the date of mailing of the document, and to whom it is being sent.

Day means calendar day. For purposes of computation, the last day of the period will be included unless it is a Saturday, Sunday, or a Federal legal holiday, in which case the next business day will be considered the last day of the period.

Debt or claim means an amount of money, funds, or property that has been determined by the Secretary to be owed to the United States by an individual, including debt administered by a third party as an agent of the Federal Government. A debt or claim includes, but is not limited to: amounts owed on account of loans made, insured or guaranteed by the Federal Government, including any deficiency or difference between the price obtained by the Federal Government upon selling the property and the amount owed to the Federal Government; overpayments to program beneficiaries; any amount the Federal Government is authorized by statute to collect for the benefit of any person; the unpaid share of any non-Federal partner in a program involving a Federal payment, including a matching or cost-sharing payment of the non-Federal partner; any fine, civil penalty or assessment; and other amounts or money or property owed to the Federal Government.

Debtor means an individual who owes a delinquent non-tax debt to the United States.

Delinquent debt means any non-tax debt that has not been paid by the date specified in the Department's initial written demand for payment, or applicable payment agreement or instrument, unless other satisfactory payment arrangements have been made. For purposes of this part, "delinquent" and "overdue" have the same meaning.

Department means the United States Department of Health and Human Services, including each of its Operating Divisions and Regional Offices.

Disposable pay means that part of the debtor's compensation (including, but not limited to, salary, bonuses, commissions, and vacation pay) from an employer remaining after the deduction of health insurance premiums and any amounts required by law to be withheld. For purposes of this part, "amounts required by law to be withheld" include amounts for deductions such as social security taxes and withholding taxes, but do not include any amount withheld pursuant to a court order.

Employer means a person or entity that employs the services of others and that pays their wages or salaries. The

term employer includes, but is not limited to, State and local Governments, but does not include an agency of the Federal Government as defined by 31 CFR 285.11(c).

Garnishment means the process of withholding amounts from an employee's disposable pay and paying those amounts to a creditor in satisfaction of a withholding order.

Hearing means a review of the documentary evidence concerning the existence or amount of a debt, or the terms of a repayment schedule, provided such repayment schedule is established other than by a written agreement entered into pursuant to this part. If the hearing official determines that the issues in dispute cannot be resolved solely by review of the written record, such as when the validity of the debt turns on the issue of credibility or veracity, an oral hearing may be provided.

Hearing official means any qualified individual, as determined by the Secretary, including a Departmental Appeals Board administrative law judge.

Secretary means the Secretary of Health and Human Services, or the Secretary's designee within the Department.

Withholding order for purposes of this part means "Wage Garnishment Order (SF329B)." Also for purposes of this part, the terms "wage garnishment order" and "garnishment order" have the same meaning as "withholding order."

§ 32.3 General rule.

(a) Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this section, whenever a delinquent debt is owed by an individual, the Secretary, or another federal agency collecting a debt on the Department's behalf (*See* 45 CFR part 30), may initiate proceedings administratively to garnish the wages of the delinquent debtor.

(b) The Secretary may not garnish the wages of a debtor who the Secretary knows has been involuntarily separated from employment until the

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debtor has been re-employed continuously for at least 12 months. The debtor has the burden of informing the Secretary of the circumstances surrounding an involuntary separation from employment.

§ 32.4 Notice.

(a) Notice requirements. At least 30 days before the initiation of garnishment proceedings, the Secretary shall mail, by first class mail, to the debtor's last known address a written notice informing the debtor of:

(1) The nature and amount of the debt;

(2) The intention of the Secretary to initiate proceedings to collect the debt through deductions from pay until the debt and all accumulated interest, penalties, and administrative costs are paid in full;

(3) The debtor's right—

(i) To inspect and copy Department records related to the debt;

(ii) To enter into a written repayment agreement with the Department under terms agreeable to the Department;

(iii) To a hearing, in accordance with § 32.5, concerning the existence or the amount of the debt or the terms of the proposed repayment schedule under the garnishment order, except that the debtor is not entitled to a hearing concerning the proposed repayment schedule if the terms were established by written agreement pursuant to paragraph (a)(3)(ii) of this section; and

(4) The time frames within which the debtor may exercise his or her rights.

(b) The Secretary will keep a copy of the dated notice. The notice may be retained electronically so long as the manner of retention is sufficient for evidentiary purposes.

§ 32.5 Hearing.

(a) *In general.* Upon timely written request of the debtor, the Secretary shall provide a hearing, which at the Department's option may be oral or written, concerning the existence or amount of the debt, or the terms of a repayment schedule established other than by written agreement under § 32.4(a)(3)(ii).

(b) *Request for hearing.* (1) The request for a hearing must be signed by the

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debtor, state each issue being disputed, and identify and explain with reasonable specificity all facts and evidence that the debtor believes supports the debtor's position. Supporting documentation identified by the debtor should be attached to the request.

(2) *Effect of timely request.* Subject to paragraph (j) of this section, if the debtor's written request is received on or before the 15th business day following the mailing of the written notice required under this part, a withholding order shall not be issued under § 32.6 until the debtor has been provided the requested hearing and a decision in accordance with paragraphs (g) and (h) of this section has been rendered.

(3) *Failure to timely request a hearing.* If the debtor's written request is received after the 15th business day following the mailing of the written notice required under this part, the Secretary shall provide a hearing to the debtor. However, the Secretary shall not delay the issuance of a withholding order unless the Secretary determines that the delay in submitting such request was caused by factors beyond the control of the debtor, or the Secretary receives information that the Secretary determines justifies a delay or cancellation of the withholding order.

(c) *Oral hearing.* (1) For purposes of this section, a debtor shall be provided a reasonable opportunity for an oral hearing when the hearing official determines that the issues in dispute cannot be resolved by review of the documentary evidence, such as when the validity of the claim turns on the issue of credibility or veracity.

(2) If the hearing official determines an oral hearing is appropriate, the hearing official will establish the date, time and location of the hearing. At the debtor's option, the oral hearing may be conducted in person or by telephone conference. The hearing official will notify the debtor of the date, time, and in the case of an in-person hearing, the location of the hearing. All travel expenses incurred by the debtor in connection with an in-person hearing will be borne by the debtor.

(d) *Paper hearing.* (1) If the hearing official determines an oral hearing is not required by this section, the hearing official shall afford the debtor a

paper hearing, that is, the issues in dispute will be decided based upon a review of the written record.

(2) The hearing official shall notify the debtor of the deadline for the submission of additional evidence if necessary for a review of the record.

(e) *Burden of proof.* (1) The Secretary has the initial burden of proving the existence or amount of the debt.

(2) Thereafter, if the debtor disputes the existence or amount of the debt, the debtor must present by a preponderance of the evidence that no debt exists or that the amount is incorrect. When challenging the terms of a repayment schedule, the debtor must establish by a preponderance of the evidence that the terms of the repayment schedule are unlawful, would cause financial hardship to the debtor, or that collection of the debt may not be pursued due to operation of law.

(f) *Record.* The hearing official shall maintain a summary record of any hearing provided under this part. A hearing is not required to be a formal evidentiary-type hearing, but witnesses who testify in an oral hearing must do so under oath or affirmation.

(g) *Date of decision.* (1) The hearing official shall issue a written decision, as soon as practicable, but no later than sixty (60) days after the date on which the request for the hearing was received by the Department.

(2) If the hearing official is unable to provide the debtor with a hearing and render a decision within 60 days after the receipt of the request for such hearing:

(i) A withholding order may not be issued until the hearing is held and a decision is rendered; or

(ii) A withholding order previously issued to the debtor's employer must be suspended beginning on the 61st day after the receipt of the hearing request and continuing until a hearing is held and a decision is rendered.

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

(1) A summary of the facts presented;

(2) The hearing official's findings, analysis, and conclusions; and

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

(i) *Final agency action.* The hearing official's decision will be the final

agency action for the purposes of judicial review under the Administrative Procedure Act, 5 U.S.C. 701 *et seq.*

(j) *Failure to appear.* In the absence of good cause shown, a debtor who fails to appear at a hearing will be deemed as not having timely filed a request for a hearing.

§ 32.6 Withholding order.

(a) Unless the Secretary receives information that the Secretary determines justifies a delay or cancellation of a withholding order, the Secretary shall send, by first class mail, an SF-329A "Letter to Employer & Important Notice to Employer," an SF-329B "Wage Garnishment Order," an SF-329C "Wage Garnishment Worksheet," and an SF-329D "Employer Certification," to the debtor's employer within 30 days after the debtor fails to make a timely request for a hearing, *i.e.*, within 15 business days after mailing the notice required under this part, or, if the timely request for a hearing is made by the debtor, within 30 days after a final decision is made by the Secretary to proceed with garnishment.

(b) The Secretary shall keep a copy of the dated letter to the employer and a copy of the wage garnishment order. The certificate of service may be retained electronically so long as the manner of retention is sufficient for evidentiary purposes.

§ 32.7 Certification by employer.

The employer must complete and return the SF-329D, "Employer Certification" to the Department within 20 days of receipt.

§ 32.8 Amounts withheld.

(a) After receipt of a withholding order issued under this part, the employer shall deduct from all disposable pay paid to the debtor during each pay period the amount of garnishment described in paragraph (b) of this section. The employer may use the SF-329C "Wage Garnishment Worksheet" to calculate the amount to be deducted from the debtor's disposable pay.

(b) Subject to paragraphs (c) and (d) of this section, the amount of garnishment shall be the lesser of:

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(1) The amount indicated on the garnishment order up to 15% of the debtor's disposable pay; or

(2) The amount set forth in 15 U.S.C. 1673(a)(2) (Maximum allowable garnishment). The amount set forth at 15 U.S.C. 1673(a)(2) is the amount by which a debtor's disposable pay exceeds an amount equivalent to thirty times the minimum wage. *See* 29 CFR 870.10.

(c)(1) Except as provided in paragraph (c)(2) of this section, when a debtor's pay is subject to multiple withholding orders, unless otherwise provided by Federal law, withholding orders issued pursuant to this part shall have priority over other withholding orders that are served later in time.

(2) Notwithstanding the foregoing, withholding orders for family support shall have priority over withholding orders issued under this part.

(3) If amounts are being withheld from a debtor's pay pursuant to a withholding order served on an employer before a withholding order issued pursuant to this part, or if a withholding order for family support is served on an employer at any time, the amounts withheld pursuant to a withholding order issued under this part shall be the lesser of:

(i) The amount calculated under paragraph (b) of this section, or

(ii) An amount equal to 25% of the debtor's disposable pay less the amount(s) withheld under the withholding order(s) with priority.

(d) If the debtor owes more than one debt to the Department, the Secretary may issue multiple withholding orders provided that the total amount garnished from the debtor's pay for such orders does not exceed the amount set forth in paragraph (b) of this section.

(e) An amount greater than that set forth in paragraphs (b) or (c) of this section may be withheld upon the written consent of the debtor.

(f) The employer shall promptly pay to the Department all amounts withheld in accordance with the withholding order issued pursuant to this part.

(g) The employer is not required to vary its normal pay and disbursement cycles in order to comply with the withholding order.

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(h) Any assignment or allotment by an employee shall be void to the extent it interferes with or prohibits execution of the withholding order issued under this part, except for any assignment or allotment made pursuant to a family support judgment or order.

(i) The employer shall withhold the appropriate amount from the debtor's wages for each pay period until the employer receives notification from the Secretary to discontinue wage withholding.

(j) The withholding order, SF-329B "Wage Garnishment Order," sent to the employer under §32.6, requires the employer to commence wage withholding on the first pay day after the employer receives the order. However, if the first pay day is within 10 days after receipt of the order, the employer may begin deductions on the second pay day.

(k) An employer may not discharge, refuse to employ, or take disciplinary action against any debtor as a result of the issuance of a withholding order under this part.

[68 FR 15093, Mar. 28, 2003; 68 FR 24052, May 6, 2003]

§ 32.9 Financial hardship.

(a) A debtor whose wages are subject to a withholding order may, at any time, request a review by the Department of the amount garnished, based on materially changed circumstances such as disability, divorce, or catastrophic illness which result in financial hardship.

(b) A debtor requesting such a review under paragraph (a) of this section shall submit the basis for claiming that the current amount of garnishment results in a financial hardship to the debtor, along with supporting documentation. The Secretary shall consider any information submitted in accordance with this part.

(c) If a financial hardship is found, the Secretary shall downwardly adjust, by an amount and for a period of time established by the Secretary, the amount garnished to reflect the debtor's financial condition. The Secretary will notify the employer of any adjustments to the amount to be withheld.

§ 32.10 Refunds.

(a) If the hearing official, pursuant to a hearing under this part, determines that a debt is not legally due and owing to the United States, the Secretary shall promptly refund any amount collected by means of administrative wage garnishment.

(b) Unless required by Federal law or contract, refunds under this part shall not bear interest.

§ 32.11 Ending garnishment.

(a) Once the Department has fully recovered the amounts owed by the debtor, including interest, penalties, and administrative costs assessed pursuant to and in accordance with part 30 of this title, the Secretary shall send the debtor's employer notification to discontinue wage withholding.

(b) At least annually, the Secretary shall review its debtors' accounts to ensure that garnishment has been terminated for accounts that have been paid in full.

§ 32.12 Right of action.

(a) The employer of a debtor subject to wage withholding pursuant to this part shall pay to the Department as directed in a withholding order issued under this part.

(b) The Secretary may bring suit against an employer for any amount that the employer fails to withhold from wages owed and payable to a debtor in accordance with §§ 32.6 and 32.8, plus attorney's fees, costs, and, if applicable, punitive damages.

(c) A suit under this section may not be filed before the termination of the collection action involving a particular debtor, unless earlier filing is necessary to avoid expiration of any applicable statute of limitations period. For purposes of this section, "termination of collection action" occurs when the Secretary has terminated collection action in accordance with part 30 of this title, or other applicable law or regulation.

(d) Notwithstanding deemed to occur if from a debtor whose paragraph (c) of this section, termination of the collection action will be a period of one (1) year the Department does not receive any payments wages were subject to a

garnishment order issued under this part.

PART 33—SALARY OFFSET

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AUTHORITY: 5 U.S.C. 5514; 5 CFR Part 550, Subpart K.

SOURCE: 72 FR 10421, Mar. 8, 2007, unless otherwise noted.

§ 33.1 Purpose, authority, and scope.

(a) *Purpose.* This part prescribes the Department's standards and procedures for the collection of debts owed by Federal employees to the United States through involuntary salary offset.

(b) *Authority.* 5 U.S.C. 5514; 5 CFR part 550, subpart K.

(c) *Scope.* (1) This part applies to internal and Government-wide collections of debts owed by Federal employees by administrative offset from the current pay account of the debtor without his or her consent.

(2) The procedures contained in this part do not apply to any case where an employee consents to collection through deduction(s) from the employee's pay account, or to debts arising under the Internal Revenue Code or the tariff laws of the United States, or where another statute explicitly provides for, or prohibits, collection of a debt by salary offset (e.g., travel advances in 5 U.S.C. 5705 and employee training expenses in 5 U.S.C. 4108).