

Federal Communications Commission

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The Commission utilizes demand letters and procedures that will lead to the earliest practicable determination of whether the debt can be resolved administratively or must be referred for litigation.

(d) The Commission may, as circumstances and the nature of the debt permit, include in demand letters such items as the Commission's willingness to discuss alternative methods of payment; its policies with respect to the use of credit bureaus, debt collection centers, and collection agencies; the Commission's remedies to enforce payment of the debt (including assessment of interest, administrative costs and penalties, administrative garnishment, the use of collection agencies, Federal salary offset, tax refund offset, administrative offset, and litigation); the requirement that any debt delinquent for more than 180 days be transferred to the Department of the Treasury for collection; and, depending on applicable statutory authority, the debtor's entitlement to consideration of a waiver. Where applicable, the debtor will be provided with a period of time (normally not more than 15 calendar days) from the date of the demand in which to exercise the opportunity to request a review.

(e) The Commission will respond promptly to communications from the debtor, within 30 days whenever feasible, and will advise debtors who dispute the debt that they must furnish available evidence to support their contentions.

(f) Prior to the initiation of the demand process or at any time during or after completion of the demand process, if the Commission determines to pursue, or is required to pursue, offset, the procedures applicable to offset in §§ 1.1912 and 1.1913, as applicable, will be followed. The availability of funds or money for debt satisfaction by offset and the Commission's determination to pursue collection by offset shall release the Commission from the necessity of further compliance with paragraphs (a), (b), (c), and (d) of this section.

(g) Prior to referring a debt for litigation, the Commission will advise each person determined to be liable for the debt that, unless the debt can be collected administratively, litigation

may be initiated. This notification will follow the requirements of Executive Order 12988 (3 CFR, 1996 Comp., pp. 157-163) and may be given as part of a demand letter under paragraph (b) of this section or in a separate document. Litigation counsel for the Government will be advised that this notice has been given.

(h) When the Commission learns that a bankruptcy petition has been filed with respect to a debtor, before proceeding with further collection action, the Commission may immediately seek legal advice from its counsel concerning the impact of the Bankruptcy Code on any pending or contemplated collection activities. Unless the Commission determines that the automatic stay imposed at the time of filing pursuant to 11 U.S.C. 362 has been lifted or is no longer in effect, in most cases collection activity against the debtor should stop immediately.

(1) After seeking legal advice, a proof of claim will be filed in most cases with the bankruptcy court or the Trustee. The Commission will refer to the provisions of 11 U.S.C. 106 relating to the consequences on sovereign immunity of filing a proof of claim.

(2) If the Commission is a secured creditor, it may seek relief from the automatic stay regarding its security, subject to the provisions and requirements of 11 U.S.C. 362.

(3) Offset is stayed in most cases by the automatic stay. However, the Commission will determine from its counsel whether its payments to the debtor and payments of other agencies available for offset may be frozen by the Commission until relief from the automatic stay can be obtained from the bankruptcy court. The Commission will also determine from its counsel whether recoupment is available.

§ 1.1912 Collection by administrative offset.

(a) *Scope.* (1) The term *administrative offset* has the meaning provided in § 1.1901.

(2) This section does not apply to:

(i) Debts arising under the Social Security Act, except as provided in 42 U.S.C. 404;

(ii) Payments made under the Social Security Act, except as provided for in

31 U.S.C. 3716(c) (see 31 CFR 285.4, Federal Benefit Offset);

(iii) Debts arising under, or payments made under, the Internal Revenue Code (see 31 CFR 285.2, Tax Refund Offset) or the tariff laws of the United States;

(iv) Offsets against Federal salaries to the extent these standards are inconsistent with regulations published to implement such offsets under 5 U.S.C. 5514 and 31 U.S.C. 3716 (see 5 CFR part 550, subpart K, and 31 CFR 285.7, Federal Salary Offset);

(v) Offsets under 31 U.S.C. 3728 against a judgment obtained by a debtor against the United States;

(vi) Offsets or recoupments under common law, State law, or Federal statutes specifically prohibiting offsets or recoupments of particular types of debts; or

(vii) Offsets in the course of judicial proceedings, including bankruptcy.

(3) Unless otherwise provided for by contract or law, debts or payments that are not subject to administrative offset under 31 U.S.C. 3716 may be collected by administrative offset under the common law or other applicable statutory authority.

(4) Unless otherwise provided by law, administrative offset of payments under the authority of 31 U.S.C. 3716 to collect a debt may not be conducted more than 10 years after the Government's right to collect the debt first accrued, unless facts material to the Government's right to collect the debt were not known and could not reasonably have been known by the official or officials of the Government who were charged with the responsibility to discover and collect such debts. This limitation does not apply to debts reduced to a judgment.

(5) In bankruptcy cases, the Commission will seek legal advice from its counsel concerning the impact of the Bankruptcy Code, particularly 11 U.S.C. 106, 362, and 553, on pending or contemplated collections by offset.

(b) *Mandatory centralized administrative offset.* (1) The Commission is required to refer past due, legally enforceable nontax debts which are over 180 days delinquent to the Treasury for collection by centralized administrative offset. Debts which are less than 180 days delinquent also may be re-

ferred to the Treasury for this purpose. See FCCS for debt certification requirements.

(2) The names and taxpayer identifying numbers (TINs) of debtors who owe debts referred to the Treasury as described in paragraph (b)(1) of this section shall be compared to the names and TINs on payments to be made by Federal disbursing officials. Federal disbursing officials include disbursing officials of Treasury, the Department of Defense, the United States Postal Service, other Government corporations, and disbursing officials of the United States designated by the Treasury. When the name and TIN of a debtor match the name and TIN of a payee and all other requirements for offset have been met, the payment will be offset to satisfy the debt.

(3) Federal disbursing officials will notify the debtor/payee in writing that an offset has occurred to satisfy, in part or in full, a past due, legally enforceable delinquent debt. The notice shall include a description of the type and amount of the payment from which the offset was taken, the amount of offset that was taken, the identity of the creditor agency requesting the offset, and a contact point within the creditor agency who will respond to questions regarding the offset.

(4)(i) Before referring a delinquent debt to the Treasury for administrative offset, and subject to any agreement and/or waiver to the contrary by the debtor, the Commission shall ensure that offsets are initiated only after the debtor:

(A) Has been sent written notice of the type and amount of the debt, the intention of the Commission to use administrative offset to collect the debt, and an explanation of the debtor's rights under 31 U.S.C. 3716; and

(B) The debtor has been given:

(1) The opportunity to request within 15 days of the date of the written notice, after which opportunity is deemed waived, by the debtor, to inspect and copy Commission records related to the debt;

(2) The opportunity, unless otherwise waived by the debtor, for a review within the Commission of the determination of indebtedness; and

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(3) The opportunity to request within 15 days of the date of the written notice, after which the opportunity is deemed waived by the debtor, for the debtor to make a written agreement to repay the debt.

(ii) The Commission may omit the procedures set forth in paragraph (a)(4)(i) of this section when:

(A) The offset is in the nature of a recoupment;

(B) The debt arises under a contract as set forth in *Cecile Industries, Inc. v. Cheney*, 995 F.2d 1052 (Fed. Cir. 1993) (notice and other procedural protections set forth in 31 U.S.C. 3716(a) do not supplant or restrict established procedures for contractual offsets accommodated by the Contracts Disputes Act); or

(C) In the case of non-centralized administrative offsets conducted under paragraph (c) of this section, the Commission first learns of the existence of the amount owed by the debtor when there is insufficient time before payment would be made to the debtor/payee to allow for prior notice and an opportunity for review. When prior notice and an opportunity for review are omitted, the Commission shall give the debtor such notice and an opportunity for review as soon as practicable and shall promptly refund any money ultimately found not to have been owed to the Government.

(iii) When the Commission previously has given a debtor any of the required notice and review opportunities with respect to a particular debt (*see* 31 CFR 901.2), the Commission need not duplicate such notice and review opportunities before administrative offset may be initiated.

(5) Before the Commission refers delinquent debts to the Treasury, the Office of Managing Director must certify, in a form acceptable to the Treasury, that:

(i) The debt(s) is (are) past due and legally enforceable; and

(ii) The Commission has complied with all due process requirements under 31 U.S.C. 3716(a) and its regulations.

(6) Payments that are prohibited by law from being offset are exempt from centralized administrative offset. The Treasury shall exempt payments under

means-tested programs from centralized administrative offset when requested in writing by the head of the payment certifying or authorizing agency. Also, the Treasury may exempt other classes of payments from centralized offset upon the written request of the head of the payment certifying or authorizing agency.

(7) Benefit payments made under the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 301 *et seq.*), part B of the Black Lung Benefits Act (30 U.S.C. 921 *et seq.*), and any law administered by the Railroad Retirement Board (other than tier 2 benefits), may be offset only in accordance with Treasury regulations, issued in consultation with the Social Security Administration, the Railroad Retirement Board, and the Office of Management and Budget. *See* 31 CFR 285.4.

(8) In accordance with 31 U.S.C. 3716(f), the Treasury may waive the provisions of the Computer Matching and Privacy Protection Act of 1988 concerning matching agreements and post-match notification and verification (5 U.S.C. 552a(o) and (p)) for centralized administrative offset upon receipt of a certification from a creditor agency that the due process requirements enumerated in 31 U.S.C. 3716(a) have been met. The certification of a debt in accordance with paragraph (b)(5) of this section will satisfy this requirement. If such a waiver is granted, only the Data Integrity Board of the Department of the Treasury is required to oversee any matching activities, in accordance with 31 U.S.C. 3716(g). This waiver authority does not apply to offsets conducted under paragraphs (c) and (d) of this section.

(c) *Non-centralized administrative offset.* (1) Generally, non-centralized administrative offsets are ad hoc case-by-case offsets that the Commission conducts, at the Commission's discretion, internally or in cooperation with the agency certifying or authorizing payments to the debtor. Unless otherwise prohibited by law, when centralized administrative offset is not available or appropriate, past due, legally enforceable nontax delinquent debts may be collected through non-centralized administrative offset. In these cases, a creditor agency may make a request directly to a payment-authorizing

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agency to offset a payment due a debtor to collect a delinquent debt. For example, it may be appropriate for a creditor agency to request that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) offset a Federal employee's lump-sum payment upon leaving Government service to satisfy an unpaid advance.

(2) The Commission will make reasonable effort to ensure that such offsets may occur only after:

(i) The debtor has been provided due process as set forth in paragraph (b)(4) of this section (subject to any waiver by the debtor); and

(ii) The payment authorizing agency has received written certification from the Commission that the debtor owes the past due, legally enforceable delinquent debt in the amount stated, and that the creditor agency has fully complied with its regulations concerning administrative offset.

(3) Payment authorizing agencies shall comply with offset requests by creditor agencies to collect debts owed to the United States, unless the offset would not be in the best interests of the United States with respect to the program of the payment authorizing agency, or would otherwise be contrary to law. Appropriate use should be made of the cooperative efforts of other agencies in effecting collection by administrative offset.

(4) When collecting multiple debts by non-centralized administrative offset, agencies should apply the recovered amounts to those debts in accordance with the best interests of the United States, as determined by the facts and circumstances of the particular case, particularly the applicable statute of limitations.

§ 1.1913 Administrative offset against amounts payable from Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund.

Upon providing the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) with written certification that a debtor has been afforded the procedures provided in § 1.1912(b)(4), the Commission may request OPM to offset a debtor's anticipated or future benefit payments under the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund (Fund) in accordance with regulations codified at 5 CFR 831.1801-831.1808. Upon receipt of such a request,

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OPM will identify and "flag" a debtor's account in anticipation of the time when the debtor requests, or becomes eligible to receive, payments from the Fund. This will satisfy any requirement that offset be initiated prior to the expiration of the time limitations referenced in § 1.1914(a)(4).

§ 1.1914 Collection in installments.

(a) Subject to the Commission's rules pertaining to the installment loan program (*see e.g.*, 47 CFR § 1.2110(g)), subpart Q or other agreements among the parties, the terms of which will control, whenever feasible, the Commission shall collect the total amount of a debt in one lump sum. If a debtor is financially unable to pay a debt in one lump sum, the Commission, in its sole discretion, may accept payment in regular installments. The Commission will obtain financial statements from debtors who represent that they are unable to pay in one lump sum and which are able to verify independently such representations (*see* 31 CFR 902.2(g)). The Commission will require and obtain a legally enforceable written agreement from the debtor that specifies all of the terms of the arrangement, including, as appropriate, sureties and other indicia of creditworthiness (*see* Federal Credit Reform Act of 1990, 2 U.S.C. 661, *et seq.*, OMB Circular A-129), and that contains a provision accelerating the debt in the event of default.

(b) The size and frequency of installment payments should bear a reasonable relation to the size of the debt and the debtor's ability to pay. If possible, the installment payments will be sufficient in size and frequency to liquidate the debt in three years or less.

(c) Security for deferred payments will be obtained in appropriate cases. The Commission may accept installment payments notwithstanding the refusal of the debtor to execute a written agreement or to give security, at the Commission's option.

(d) The Commission may deny the extension of credit to any debtor who fails to provide the records requested or fails to show an ability to pay the debt.