

## #53 ALLOW MEMBERS OF CERTAIN RELIGIOUS SECTS THAT DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE TO OBTAIN REFUNDS OF THEIR REMITTED EMPLOYMENT TAXES

### Present Law

Internal Revenue Code (IRC) § 3101 imposes a tax on wages paid to employees to fund old-age, survivors, and disability insurance (Social Security) and hospital insurance (Medicare) pursuant to the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA).<sup>213</sup> FICA tax is paid half by the employer and half by the employee.

IRC § 1401 imposes a comparable tax on self-employed individuals pursuant to the Self-Employment Contributions Act (SECA). SECA tax is paid entirely by the self-employed individual.

Members of the Amish community sought exclusions from these taxes because the tenets of their religion prohibit them from accepting social insurance benefits. In response, Congress enacted IRC § 1402(g), which exempts self-employed individuals who are members of certain religious faiths from the requirement to pay SECA tax. An individual may apply for an exemption from paying SECA tax by filing IRS Form 4029, Application for Exemption From Social Security and Medicare Taxes and Waiver of Benefits:

... if he is a member of a recognized religious sect or division thereof and is an adherent of established tenets or teachings of such sect or division by reason of which he is conscientiously opposed to acceptance of the benefits of any private or public insurance which makes payments in the event of death, disability, old-age, or retirement or makes payments toward the cost of, or provides services for, medical care (including the benefits of any insurance system established by the Social Security Act).

Congress subsequently enacted IRC § 3127 to exempt employers from paying their portion of FICA tax under IRC § 3111, provided that both the employer and the employee are members of the same recognized religious sect, both the employer and the employee are adherents of established tenets or teachings of the sect, and both the employer and employee file and receive approval for exemption from their respective portions of FICA tax.<sup>214</sup> The employer and employee each may receive approval by filing IRS Form 4029.<sup>215</sup>

IRC § 6413(b) requires the IRS to refund any overpayment of a taxpayer's FICA tax.

### Reasons for Change

The current exemptions under IRC §§ 1402(g) and 3127 do not extend to members of recognized religious sects who work for employers that are not members of the same or any religious sect. As a result, members of these sects pay for Social Security and Medicare benefits that their religious beliefs prohibit them from

213 Under IRC § 3101, a tax of 6.2 percent is imposed on employee wages to fund old age, survivors and disability insurance, and an additional tax of 1.45 percent is imposed to fund hospital insurance. In certain circumstances, employee wages are subject to an additional 0.9 percent tax to further fund hospital insurance (Additional Medicare Tax). Employers are generally required to withhold FICA taxes from their employees' wages under IRC § 3102(a).

214 IRC § 3127 establishes the requirements for employers and employees who are members and adherents of the same religious sect to be exempt from their respective FICA tax obligations as required under IRC §§ 3101 and 3111. If the employer is a partnership, all partners of that partnership must be members of and adhere to the tenets of the same recognized religious sect. All partners of the partnership must apply and be approved individually for the exemption. Treas. Reg. § 31.3127-1(a).

215 For more information regarding the Form 4029 exemption application for members of recognized religious sects, see IRS Publication 517, Social Security and Other Information for Members of the Clergy and Religious Workers (Jan. 17, 2019).

accepting. The National Taxpayer Advocate believes that result is inequitable. The rationale for exempting self-employed Amish workers and Amish employees of Amish employers, as the law currently provides, applies equally with respect to Amish employees who are working for non-Amish employers.

This inequity can be resolved by amending IRC § 6413 to allow employees who are members of a recognized religious group and work for an employer who is *not* a member of a recognized religious group to file a refund claim for their portion of remitted FICA tax. Amish leaders have expressed a preference for allowing Amish employees of non-Amish employers to recover the employee's portion of the FICA tax through a refund claim, rather than by exempting the employee from paying the FICA tax in the first instance, to avoid imposing an additional recordkeeping burden on employers.<sup>216</sup>

### Recommendation

- Amend IRC § 6413 to allow employees who meet the definition of “a member of a recognized religious sect or division thereof” in IRC § 1402(g) to claim a credit or refund of the employee's portion of FICA taxes withheld from their wages.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Meeting between TAS and Amish leaders (Aug. 16, 2019).

<sup>217</sup> For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see AMISH Act, H.R. 2714, 116th Cong. (2019).