

Legislative Recommendation #21**Clarify When the Two-Year Period for Requesting Return of Levy Proceeds Begins****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* The IRS is authorized to return money wrongfully levied upon if the taxpayer or third party requests the return within two years from the “date of levy.” For paper levies delivered by hand or mail, the “date of levy” is the date the notice of levy was served. For levies imposed by electronic means, the “date of levy” is the date on which the IRS received the levied proceeds. Consequently, individuals subject to electronic levies often are able to recover wrongfully levied funds that taxpayers subject to paper levies may not recover.
- *Solution:* Allow the IRS to return funds received through wrongful levies if the funds were received by the IRS within the preceding two years, regardless of the date the original levy was served.

PRESENT LAW

IRC § 6331(a) allows the IRS to levy on a taxpayer’s property and rights to property that exist at the time the levy is served. Rights to property include fixed and determinable obligations to which the levy attaches, even if receipt of a payment arising from the obligation is deferred until a later date.

IRC § 6331(e) allows the IRS to serve a levy on the taxpayer’s salary or wages that continues from the date the levy is first made until the levy is released under IRC § 6343.

IRC § 6331(h) allows the IRS to serve a levy on federal payments specified under that provision, such as Social Security benefits, which continues from the date the levy is first made until the levy is released. This levy is made by electronic means under the Federal Payment Levy Program (FPLP).

IRC § 6343(b) authorizes the IRS to return money levied upon or money received from the sale of levied property to *third parties* when it determines the levy was wrongful within the meaning of IRC § 7426(a)(1), provided that the third party requests the return within two years from the “date of levy.”

IRC § 6343(d) authorizes the IRS to return money levied upon or money received from the sale of levied property to *the taxpayer* when it determines one of the circumstances specified in IRC § 6343(d)(2) exists, provided that the taxpayer requests the return within two years from the “date of levy.”¹

For levies delivered by hand, the IRS takes the position that the “date of levy” is the date of delivery.² For mailed levies, Treas. Reg. § 301.6331-1(c) similarly defines the term “date of levy” as the date the levy is delivered to the person in possession of the property. By contrast, for levies imposed by electronic means through the FPLP, the IRS has adopted a policy to return all or a portion of the FPLP proceeds it received during the two-year period preceding the date of request for their return without regard to the date the initial levy was delivered.³

1 IRC § 6343(b) & (d) permits the IRS to return specific property levied upon at any time.

2 *Cf. American Honda Motor Co., Inc. v. United States*, 363 F. Supp. 988, 991-992 (S.D.N.Y. 1973) (holding that date of levy for purposes of timely filing suit under IRC § 6532(c)(1) is the date when the notice of levy is served upon the person in possession of the taxpayer’s property).

3 The Treasury regulations under IRC § 6331 do not define the term “date of levy” when the levy occurs through electronic means as used in the FPLP. The IRS’s policy is set forth in the Internal Revenue Manual (IRM). See IRM 5.19.9.3.7(5), Returning SITLP Payments (June 23, 2022); IRM 5.11.7.3.7(2), Returning FPLP Levy Proceeds (July 1, 2022).

REASONS FOR CHANGE

The IRS may issue levies to attach a taxpayer's assets, such as wages, pension benefits, annuities, or Social Security benefits, that result in multiple payments over many years. The IRS has the authority to return levy proceeds to a third party or the taxpayer if the person requests the proceeds within two years of the date of levy. The IRS generally interprets the "date of levy" to mean the date the IRS delivers a notice of levy by mail or by hand to the person in possession of the property levied. In the case of a continuous levy under IRC § 6331(e), the date of levy is the date the notice of levy is first served by hand or by mail on the person in possession of the taxpayer's salary or wages.⁴ If the taxpayer requests return of levy payments more than two years after the date the notice of levy was served, the IRS is not authorized to return any payments. In the case of FPLP levies under IRC § 6331(h), however, the IRS will return a levied payment if the payment was made within the two-year period before the date of the request for return. This results in similarly situated persons being treated differently and infringes upon a third party or taxpayer's *right to a fair and just tax system*.

Example: Assume the IRS issues a continuous levy under IRC § 6331(e) to the taxpayer's employer in Year One, and the employer withholds and pays over to the IRS a portion of the taxpayer's paychecks for each month of the next four years. Then in Year Four, the taxpayer's dependent becomes ill, and as a result, his living expenses increase significantly due to large medical bills. The levy is now causing an economic hardship to the taxpayer.

The taxpayer asks the IRS to release the levy and return the portion of the levy proceeds that were taken during the time in which the taxpayer was experiencing economic hardship, and the IRS agrees that it is in the best interests of the taxpayer and the government to do so. However, the IRS is prohibited from returning the levy proceeds to the taxpayer because more than two years have elapsed since the date the levy was served on the employer.

Contrast this result with a taxpayer whose Social Security benefits are levied under the FPLP. The IRS may return up to the last two years of levy payments even if the request occurs more than two years after the FPLP levies began.

RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6343(b) to strike the term "date of such levy" and substitute "each date the IRS receives money from the levy or the date the IRS receives the money from the sale of levied property."

⁴ Such a levy is issued via Form 668-W and is generally a "paper" levy. A paper levy is defined as "either a manual or systemic levy on Form 668-A, or Form 668-W, that is prepared and issued by an RO." IRM 5.11.5.1.6, Terms/Definitions/Acronyms (June 13, 2018). This differs from an FPLP levy, which is an automated levy. Automated levies are "levies issued through the Automated Levy Programs. These levies are transmitted electronically. The proceeds are also received electronically." *Id.*