

Legislative Recommendation #6**Adjust Individual Estimated Tax Payment Deadlines to Occur Quarterly****SUMMARY**

- *Problem:* Estimated tax installment payments for individual taxpayers are sometimes referred to as “quarterly payments,” but they are not due at even three-month intervals. Rather, they are spaced at three-month, two-month, three-month, and four-month intervals (April 15, June 15, September 15, and January 15). This is confusing to taxpayers and can make it difficult for them to calculate their net income; few self-employed individuals and small businesses keep their books and records based on these uneven cutoff dates.
- *Solution:* Revise the estimated tax payment deadlines so they fall at even quarterly intervals.

PRESENT LAW

Under IRC § 6654(c), individual taxpayers generally are required to make estimated tax payments in four installments due on April 15, June 15, September 15, and January 15. Under IRC § 6654(l), the same deadlines generally apply for estates and trusts.¹

REASONS FOR CHANGE

Although estimated tax installment payments are sometimes referred to as “quarterly payments,” the payment dates do not align with calendar year quarters and are not evenly spaced at three-month intervals.

These dates are not intuitive and create compliance burdens. Small business owners and self-employed individuals are particularly affected by the estimated tax rules because their incomes generally are not subject to wage withholding. Yet small businesses are far more likely to keep their books based on regular three-month quarters than based on the seemingly random intervals prescribed by IRC § 6654.

These uneven intervals make it more difficult for many taxpayers to calculate net income and save appropriately to make estimated tax payments and thus may reduce compliance.² They also cause confusion, as taxpayers struggle to remember the due dates. This confusion affects both traditionally self-employed workers and workers in the gig economy. Setting due dates to fall 15 days after the end of each calendar quarter would be more logical and would make it easier for taxpayers to remember and comply with the due dates.

1 IRC § 6654(j) requires certain non-resident aliens to make three estimated tax payments, which are due on June 15, September 15, and January 15. The June 15 date coincides with the due date for Form 1040-NR, U.S. Nonresident Alien Income Tax Return, as provided in IRC § 6072(c). If this proposal is adopted, we recommend the second payment deadline be changed from September 15 to October 15 for consistency. IRC § 6655(c) generally requires corporate taxpayers to make estimated tax payments in four installments due on April 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15. Some of the benefits of establishing uniform quarterly deadlines apply to corporate taxpayers to the same extent as individuals. However, we have not analyzed the implications of changing the corporate deadlines, so this recommendation is limited to the deadline applicable to individual taxpayers.

2 Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, Ref. No. 2004-30-040, *While Progress Toward Earlier Intervention With Delinquent Taxpayers Has Been Made, Action Is Needed to Prevent Noncompliance With Estimated Tax Payment Requirements* 12 (2004).

RECOMMENDATION

- Amend IRC § 6654(c)(2) to set the estimated tax installment deadlines 15 days after the end of each calendar quarter (April 15, July 15, October 15, and January 15).³

³ For legislative language generally consistent with this recommendation, see, e.g., Tax Deadline Simplification Act, H.R. 3708, 118th Cong. § 2 (2023) and H.R. 4214, 117th Cong. § 2 (2021); Tax Deadline Uniformity Act of 2020, H.R. 5979, 116th Cong. § 2 (2020); Small Business Owners' Tax Simplification Act of 2019, H.R. 593, 116th Cong. § 2 (2019).