

#39 CLARIFY THE AUTHORITY OF THE NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATE TO MAKE PERSONNEL DECISIONS TO PROTECT THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE OFFICE OF THE TAXPAYER ADVOCATE

Present Law

The IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998 (RRA 98) included several provisions to protect TAS's independence from the IRS, such as those that provide the National Taxpayer Advocate with the authority to make independent personnel decisions. Internal Revenue Code (IRC) § 7803(c)(4)(A)(iii) requires local TAS offices to notify taxpayers that they “operate independently of any other Internal Revenue Service office and report directly to Congress through the National Taxpayer Advocate.” To bolster this independence, IRC § 7803(c)(2)(D) provides the National Taxpayer Advocate with the authority to “appoint” Local Taxpayer Advocates in each state and to “evaluate and take personnel actions (including dismissal) with respect to any employee of any local office.” IRC § 7803(c)(2)(C)(iv) also provides that the Commissioner and the National Taxpayer Advocate will “develop career paths for local taxpayer advocates.”

The RRA 98 conference report states that the National Taxpayer Advocate “has the responsibility to evaluate and take personnel actions (including dismissal) with respect to any Local Taxpayer Advocate *or any employee in the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate.*”¹⁵⁷ However, the statutory language does not include the final italicized clause.

Reasons for Change

IRC § 7803(c) directs the National Taxpayer Advocate to operate independently in advocating for systemic change, as well as in advocating on behalf of specific taxpayers. For example, the National Taxpayer Advocate is required by IRC § 7803(c)(2) to propose administrative and legislative changes to mitigate problems that taxpayers encounter in their dealings with the IRS and to provide “full and substantive” analyses of a wide range of issues in reports to Congress. Moreover, IRC § 7803(c)(2)(B)(iii) requires these reports to be submitted “without any prior review or comment from ... the Commissioner, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Oversight Board, any other officer or employee of the Department of the Treasury, or the Office of Management and Budget.” Thus, the National Taxpayer Advocate is required to hire and retain qualified and independent employees in both her case advocacy and systemic advocacy operations to fulfill TAS's statutory mission.

As noted above, the RRA 98 conference report expressed congressional intent to give the National Taxpayer Advocate personnel authority over “any employee” in the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate. However, IRC § 7803(c)(2)(D) grants the National Taxpayer Advocate personnel authority only over employees of “any local office.” It does not grant the National Taxpayer Advocate the authority to make independent personnel decisions with respect to TAS's senior leadership, TAS attorney-advisors, employees of TAS's systemic advocacy and research functions, and other national office employees, even though those employees are also charged with engaging in independent advocacy on behalf of taxpayers and are subject to the same potential conflicts and potential retaliatory personnel actions by the IRS leadership that Congress sought to address in 1998.

Recommendation

- Amend IRC § 7803(c)(2)(D) to clarify that the National Taxpayer Advocate has the responsibility to evaluate and take personnel actions with respect to all employees of the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate.

¹⁵⁷ H.R. REP. NO. 105-599, at 214 (1998) (Conf. Rep.) (emphasis added). The report states that the conference committee adopted the Senate amendment with respect to the National Taxpayer Advocate provisions, except as modified. H.R. REP. NO. 105-599, at 216 (1998) (Conf. Rep.). Because this provision was not modified, the language quoted above reflects the conference agreement.