

Part III – Administrative, Procedural, and Miscellaneous

PREPARER PENALTY PROVISIONS UNDER THE SMALL BUSINESS AND WORK OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 2007

NOTICE 2007-54

This notice provides guidance and transitional relief for the return preparer penalty provisions under section 6694 of the Internal Revenue Code, as amended by the Small Business and Work Opportunity Act of 2007.

SCOPE

The transitional relief provided by this notice will apply to all returns, amended returns, and refund claims due on or before December 31, 2007 (determined with regard to any extension of time for filing); to 2007 estimated tax returns due on or before January 15, 2008; and to 2007 employment and excise tax returns due on or before January 31, 2008.

BACKGROUND

The Small Business and Work Opportunity Act of 2007, Pub. L. No. 110-28, 121 Stat. ____, (the Act) was enacted into law on May 25, 2007. Section 8246 of the Act amends several provisions of the Code to extend the application of the income tax return preparer penalties to all tax return preparers, alter the standards of conduct that must be met to avoid imposition of the penalties for preparing a return which reflects an understatement of liability, and increase applicable penalties. The amendments are effective for tax returns prepared after the date of the enactment, May 25, 2007.

The amendments made by the Act raise questions regarding activities representing preparation of a tax return, who is a return preparer within the meaning of section 7701(a)(36) (as amended), and how the statute applies to signing and non-

signing preparers. In order to address these questions, the Internal Revenue Service and the Treasury Department are considering whether regulations or other published guidance are needed, including but not limited to, amendments to Treas. Reg. sections 301.7701-15 and 1.6694-0 through 1.6694-4. Because the Act extends the types of returns subject to the new provisions, changes are also required to the relevant forms and publications. The Service must also alter existing procedures in order to process disclosures with certain forms and in electronic formats. Because the amendments to section 6694 are effective immediately for returns prepared after May 25, 2007, the Service and the Treasury Department believe that effective tax administration requires transitional relief with respect to the new standards of conduct under section 6694(a).

PENALTY UNDER SECTION 6694

Prior to amendment by the Act, the penalty under section 6694(a) applied if:

(1) any part of an understatement of liability with respect to any return or claim for refund is due to a position for which there was not a realistic possibility of being sustained on its merits,

(2) any person who is an income tax return preparer with respect to such return or claim knew (or reasonably should have known) of such position, and,

(3) such position was not disclosed as provided in section 6662(d)(2)(B)(ii) or was frivolous.

Prior to amendment by the Act, the penalty under section 6694(b) applied if any part of an understatement was due to:

(1) a willful attempt in any manner by an income tax return preparer to understate the liability for tax; or

(2) to any reckless or intentional disregard of rules or regulations by an income tax return preparer.

Section 8246 of the Act amended several provisions of the Code to extend the scope of the income tax return preparer penalties to preparers of all tax returns, amended returns and claims for refund, including estate and gift tax returns, generation-skipping transfer tax returns, employment tax returns, and excise tax returns. The Act amended section 6694(a) to provide that the penalty would apply if:

(A) the tax return preparer knew (or reasonably should have known) of the position,

(B) there was not a reasonable belief that the position would more likely than not be sustained on its merits, and

(C)(i) the position was not disclosed as provided in section 6662(d)(2)(B)(ii), or

(ii) there was no reasonable basis for the position.

Although the Act did not alter the standard of conduct under section 6694(b), it increased the amount of the penalty and made the penalty applicable to all tax return preparers.

Section 8246 of the Act amends the standards of conduct under section 6694(a) in two ways. First, for undisclosed positions, the Act replaces the realistic possibility standard with a requirement that there be a reasonable belief that the tax treatment of the position would more likely than not be sustained on its merits. Second, for disclosed positions, the Act replaces the not-frivolous standard with the requirement that there be a reasonable basis for the tax treatment of the position.

The Act also increased the first-tier section 6694(a) penalty for understatements from \$250 to the greater of \$1000 or 50% of the income derived (or to be derived) by the tax return preparer from the preparation of a return or claim with respect to which the penalty was imposed. The Act increased the second-tier section 6694(b) penalty for willful or reckless conduct from \$1000 to the greater of \$5,000 or 50% of the income derived (or to be derived) by the tax return preparer.

Under both the prior and current law, disclosure under section 6694(a) is adequate if made on a Form 8275, Disclosure Statement, or Form 8275-R, Regulation Disclosure Statement, attached to the return, amended return, or refund claim, or pursuant to the annual revenue procedure authorized in Treasury Regulation sections 1.6694-2(c)(3) and 1.6662-4(f)(2). In addition, under both the prior and current law, the penalty under section 6694(a) would not be imposed if it is shown that there is reasonable cause for the understatement and the tax return preparer acted in good faith.

TRANSITIONAL RELIEF

In order to provide sufficient time to address issues pertaining to the implementation of the Act, the Service is providing the following transitional relief: For income tax returns, amended returns, and refund claims, the standards set forth under the previous law and current regulations under section 6694 will be applied in determining whether the Service will impose a penalty under section 6694(a). Generally, in applying transitional relief for income tax returns, amended returns or refund claims, disclosure would be adequate if made on a Form 8275, Disclosure Statement, or Form 8275-R, Regulation Disclosure Statement, attached to the return, amended return, or refund claim, or pursuant to the annual revenue procedure authorized in Treasury Regulation sections 1.6694-2(c)(3) and 1.6662-4(f)(2).

For all other returns, amended returns, and claims for refund, including estate, gift, and generation-skipping transfer tax returns, employment tax returns, and excise tax returns, the reasonable basis standard set forth in the regulations issued under section 6662, without regard to the disclosure requirements contained therein, will be applied in determining whether the Service will impose a penalty under section 6694(a).

This transitional relief will apply to all returns, amended returns, and refund claims due on or before December 31, 2007 (determined with regard to any extension of time for filing); to 2007 estimated tax returns due on or before January 15, 2008; and to 2007 employment and excise tax returns due on or before January 31, 2008.

No transitional relief is available under section 6694(b) as transitional relief is not appropriate for return preparers who exhibit willful or reckless conduct, regardless of the type of return prepared.

EFFECTIVE DATE

This Notice is effective as of May 25, 2007.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The principal author of this notice is Michael E. Hara of the Office of Associate Chief Counsel (Procedure and Administration). For further information regarding this notice, contact Mr. Hara at (202) 622-4910 (not a toll-free call).