§ 7431. Civil damages for unauthorized inspection or disclosure of returns and return information

(a) In general

(1) Inspection or disclosure by employee of United States

If any officer or employee of the United States knowingly, or by reason of negligence, inspects or discloses any return or return information with respect to a taxpayer in violation of any provision of section 6103, such taxpayer may bring a civil action for damages against the United States in a district court of the United States.

(2) Inspection or disclosure by a person who is not an employee of United States

If any person who is not an officer or employee of the United States knowingly, or by reason of negligence, inspects or discloses any return or return information with respect to a taxpayer in violation of any provision of section 6103, such taxpayer may bring a civil action for damages against such person in a district court of the United States.

(b) Exceptions

No liability shall arise under this section with respect to any inspection or disclosure—

(1) which results from a good faith, but erroneous, interpretation of section 6103, or a provision to which such person is entitled.

(c) Damages

In any action brought under subsection (a), upon a finding of liability on the part of the defendant, the defendant shall be liable to the plaintiff in an amount equal to the sum of—

(1) the greater of—

(A) $1,000 for each act of unauthorized inspection or disclosure of a return or return information with respect to which such defendant is found liable, or

(B) the sum of—

(1) which is the result of gross negligence, punitive damages, plus

(2) the costs of the action, plus

(3) in the case of a willful inspection or disclosure or an inspection or disclosure which is the result of gross negligence, punitive damages, plus

(2) the costs of the action, plus

(3) in the case of a willful inspection or disclosure which is described in section 7430(c)(4)(A)(ii), reasonable
attorneys fees, except that if the defendant is the United States, reasonable attorneys fees may be awarded only if the plaintiff is the prevailing party (as determined under section 7430(c)(4)).

(d) Period for bringing action

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, an action to enforce any liability created under this section may be brought, without regard to the amount in controversy, at any time within 2 years after the date of discovery by the plaintiff of the unauthorized inspection or disclosure.

(e) Notification of unlawful inspection and disclosure

If any person is criminally charged by indictment or information with inspection or disclosure of a taxpayer’s return or return information in violation of—

(1) paragraph (1) or (2) of section 7213(a),
(2) section 7213A(a), or
(3) subparagraph (B) of section 1030(a)(2) of title 18, United States Code,

the Secretary shall notify such taxpayer as soon as practicable of such inspection or disclosure. The Secretary shall also notify such taxpayer if the Internal Revenue Service or a Federal or State agency (upon notice to the Secretary by such Federal or State agency) proposes an administrative determination as to disciplinary or adverse action against an employee arising from the employee’s unauthorized inspection or disclosure of the taxpayer’s return or return information. The notice described in this subsection shall include the date of the unauthorized inspection or disclosure and the rights of the taxpayer under such administrative determination.

(f) Definitions

For purposes of this section, the terms “inspect”, “inspection”, “return”, and “return information” have the respective meanings given such terms by section 6103(b).

(g) Extension to information obtained under section 3406

For purposes of this section—

(1) any information obtained under section 3406 (including information with respect to any payee certification failure under subsection (d) thereof) shall be treated as return information, and
(2) any inspection or use of such information other than for purposes of meeting any requirement under section 3406 or (subject to the safeguards set forth in section 6103) for purposes permitted under section 6103 shall be treated as a violation of section 6103.

For purposes of subsection (b), the reference to section 6103 shall be treated as including a reference to section 3406.

(h) Special rule for information obtained under section 6103(k)(9)

For purposes of this section, any reference to section 6103 shall be treated as including a reference to section 6311(e).


Prior Provisions

A prior section 7431 was renumbered section 7437 of this title.

AMENDMENTS

2019—Subsec. (e). Pub. L. 116–25 inserted at end of concluding provisions “The Secretary shall also notify such taxpayer if the Internal Revenue Service or a Federal or State agency (upon notice to the Secretary by such Federal or State agency) proposes an administrative determination as to disciplinary or adverse action against an employee arising from the employee’s unauthorized inspection or disclosure of the taxpayer’s return or return information. The notice described in this subsection shall include the date of the unauthorized inspection or disclosure and the rights of the taxpayer under such administrative determination.”

2006—Subsec. (a)(2). Pub. L. 109–280, which directed insertion of “or in violation of section 6104(c)” after “6103” in subsec. (a)(2) of section 7431, without specifying the act to be amended, was executed by making the insertion in subsec. (a)(2) of this section, which is section 7431 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, to reflect the probable intent of Congress.

1998—Subsec. (c)(2). Pub. L. 105–206, §3101(f), inserted “inspection or” before “disclosure”.


Subsecs. (g), (h). Pub. L. 105–206, §6012(b)(3), redesignated subsec. (g), relating to special rule for information obtained under section 6103(k)(8), as (h), and substituted “(9)” for “(8)” in heading.


Subsec. (a)(1), (2). Pub. L. 105–35, §3(a)(1), (2), substituted “Inspection or disclosure” for “Disclosure” in headings and “inspects or discloses” for “discloses” in text.

Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 105–35, §3(c), amended subsec. (b) generally. Prior to amendment, subsec. (b) read as follows:

“(b) No liability for good faith but erroneous interpretation.—No liability shall arise under this section with respect to any disclosure which results from a good faith, but erroneous, interpretation of section 6103.”

Subsec. (c)(1). Pub. L. 105–35, §3(d)(1), (2), inserted “inspection or” before “disclosure” in subpars. (A) and (B)(i) and substituted “willful inspection or disclosure or an inspection or disclosure” for “willful disclosure or a disclosure” in subpar. (B)(i).

Subsec. (d). Pub. L. 105–35, §3(d)(1), inserted “inspection or” before “disclosure”.


Subsec. (f). Pub. L. 105–35, §3(b), redesignated subsec. (e) as (f) and amended it generally. Prior to amendment, subsec. (f) read as follows:

“(f) Return; return information.—For purposes of this section, the terms ‘return’ and ‘return information’ have the respective meanings given such terms in section 6103(b).”

Subsec. (g). Pub. L. 105–35, §3(b), (d)(6), redesignated subsec. (f) as (g) and substituted “any inspection or use” for “‘any use’ in par. (2).”

Pub. L. 105–34, §1205(c)(2), added subsec. (g) relating to special rule for information obtained under section 6103(k)(8).


Effective Date of 2019 Amendment

Pub. L. 116–25, title III, §3002(b), July 1, 2019, 133 Stat. 1015, provided that: “The amendment made by this sec-
§ 7432. Civil damages for failure to release lien

(a) In general

If any officer or employee of the Internal Revenue Service knowingly, or by reason of negligence, fails to release a lien under section 6325 on property of the taxpayer, such taxpayer may bring a civil action for damages against the United States in a district court of the United States. Except as provided in section 7432, such civil action shall be the exclusive remedy for recovering damages resulting from such actions.

(b) Damages

In any action brought under subsection (a), upon a finding of liability on the part of the defendant, the defendant shall be liable to the plaintiff in an amount equal to the lesser of $1,000,000 ($100,000, in the case of negligence) or the sum of—

(1) actual, direct economic damages sustained by the plaintiff, which, but for the actions of the defendant, would not have been sustained, plus
(2) the costs of the action.

(c) Payment authority

Claims pursuant to this section shall be payable out of funds appropriated under section 1304 of title 31, United States Code.

(d) Limitations

(1) Requirement that administrative remedies be exhausted

A judgment for damages shall not be awarded under subsection (b) unless the court determines that the plaintiff has exhausted the administrative remedies available to such plaintiff within the Internal Revenue Service.

(2) Mitigation of damages

The amount of damages awarded under subsection (b)(1) shall be reduced by the amount of such damages which could have reasonably been mitigated by the plaintiff.

(3) Period for bringing action

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, an action to enforce liability created under this section may be brought without regard to the amount in controversy and may be brought only within 2 years after the date the right of action accrues.

(e) Notice of failure to release lien

The Secretary shall by regulation prescribe reasonable procedures for a taxpayer to notify the Secretary of the failure to release a lien under section 6325 on property of the taxpayer.

§ 7433. Civil damages for certain unauthorized collection actions

(a) In general

If, in connection with any collection of Federal tax with respect to a taxpayer, any officer or employee of the Internal Revenue Service recklessly or intentionally, or by reason of negligence, disregards any provision of this title, or any regulation promulgated under this title, such taxpayer may bring a civil action for damages against the United States in a district court of the United States.

(b) Damages

In any action brought under subsection (a) or petition filed under subsection (e), upon a finding of liability on the part of the defendant, the defendant shall be liable to the plaintiff in an amount equal to the lesser of $1,000,000 ($100,000, in the case of negligence) or the sum of—

(1) actual, direct economic damages sustained by the plaintiff as a proximate result of the reckless or intentional or negligent actions of the officer or employee, and
(2) the costs of the action.

(c) Payment authority

Claims pursuant to this section shall be payable out of funds appropriated under section 1304 of title 31, United States Code.

(d) Limitations

(1) Requirement that administrative remedies be exhausted

A judgment for damages shall not be awarded under subsection (b) unless the court deter-