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comply with Executive Order 12988 (3 CFR, 1996 Comp., pp. 157–163) and may be given as part of a demand letter under paragraph (b) of this section or in a separate document. Litigation counsel for the Government should be advised that this notice has been given.

(h) When an agency learns that a bankruptcy petition has been filed with respect to a debtor, before proceeding with further collection action, the agency should immediately seek legal advice from its agency counsel concerning the impact of the Bankruptcy Code on any pending or contemplated collection activities. Unless the agency determines that the automatic stay imposed at the time of filing pursuant to 11 U.S.C. 362 has been lifted or is no longer in effect, in most cases collection activity against the debtor should stop immediately.

(1) After seeking legal advice, a proof of claim should be filed in most cases with the bankruptcy court or the Trustee. Agencies should refer to the provisions of 11 U.S.C. 106 relating to the consequences on sovereign immunity of filing a proof of claim.

(2) If the agency is a secured creditor, it may seek relief from the automatic stay regarding its security, subject to the provisions and requirements of 11 U.S.C. 362.

(3) Offset is stayed in most cases by the automatic stay. However, agencies should seek legal advice from their agency counsel to determine whether their payments to the debtor and payments of other agencies available for offset may be frozen by the agency until relief from the automatic stay can be obtained from the bankruptcy court. Agencies also should seek legal advice from their agency counsel to determine whether recoupment is available.

§ 901.3 Collection by administrative offset.

(a) *Scope.* (1) The term ''administrative offset'' has the meaning provided in 31 U.S.C. 3701(a)(1).

(2) This section does not apply to:

(i) Debts arising under the Social Security Act, except as provided in 42 U.S.C. 404;

(ii) Payments made under the Social Security Act, except as provided for in 31 U.S.C. 3716(c) (see 31 CFR 285.4, Federal Benefit Offset);

(iii) Debts arising under, or payments made under, the Internal Revenue Code (see 31 CFR 285.2, Tax Refund Offset) or the tariff laws of the United States;

(iv) Offsets against Federal salaries to the extent these standards are inconsistent with regulations published to implement such offsets under 5 U.S.C. 5514 and 31 U.S.C. 3716 (see 5 CFR part 550, subpart K, and 31 CFR 285.7, Federal Salary Offset);

(v) Offsets under 31 U.S.C. 3728 against a judgment obtained by a debtor against the United States;

(vi) Offsets or recoupments under common law, State law, or Federal statutes specifically prohibiting offsets or recoupments of particular types of debts; or

(vii) Offsets in the course of judicial proceedings, including bankruptcy.

(3) Unless otherwise provided for by contract or law, debts or payments that are not subject to administrative offset under 31 U.S.C. 3716 may be collected by administrative offset under the common law or other applicable statutory authority.

(4) Unless otherwise provided by law, administrative offset of payments under the authority of 31 U.S.C. 3716 to collect a debt may not be conducted more than 10 years after the Government's right to collect the debt first accrued, unless facts material to the Government's right to collect the debt were not known and could not reasonably have been known by the official or officials of the Government who were charged with the responsibility to discover and collect such debts. This limitation does not apply to debts reduced to a judgment.

(5) In bankruptcy cases, agencies should seek legal advice from their agency counsel concerning the impact of the Bankruptcy Code, particularly 11 U.S.C. 106, 362, and 553, on pending or contemplated collections by offset.

(b) *Mandatory centralized administrative offset.* (1) Creditor agencies are required to refer past due, legally enforceable nontax debts which are over 180 days delinquent to the Secretary for collection by centralized administrative offset. Debts which are less than 180 days delinquent also may be

referred to the Secretary for this purpose. See § 901.3(b)(5) for debt certification requirements.

(2) The names and taxpayer identifying numbers (TINs) of debtors who owe debts referred to the Secretary as described in paragraph (b)(1) of this section shall be compared to the names and TINs on payments to be made by Federal disbursing officials. Federal disbursing officials include disbursing officials of Treasury, the Department of Defense, the United States Postal Service, other Government corporations, and disbursing officials of the United States designated by the Secretary. When the name and TIN of a debtor match the name and TIN of a payee and all other requirements for offset have been met, the payment will be offset to satisfy the debt.

(3) Federal disbursing officials will notify the debtor/payee in writing that an offset has occurred to satisfy, in part or in full, a past due, legally enforceable delinquent debt. The notice shall include a description of the type and amount of the payment from which the offset was taken, the amount of offset that was taken, the identity of the creditor agency requesting the offset, and a contact point within the creditor agency who will respond to questions regarding the offset.

(4)(i) Before referring a delinquent debt to the Secretary for administrative offset, agencies must have prescribed administrative offset regulations consistent with this section or have adopted this section without change by cross-reference.

(ii) Such regulations shall provide that offsets may be initiated only after the debtor:

(A) Has been sent written notice of the type and amount of the debt, the intention of the agency to use administrative offset to collect the debt, and an explanation of the debtor's rights under 31 U.S.C. 3716; and

(B) The debtor has been given:

(*1*) The opportunity to inspect and copy agency records related to the debt;

(*2*) The opportunity for a review within the agency of the determination of indebtedness; and

(*3*) The opportunity to make a written agreement to repay the debt.

(iii) Agency regulations may provide for the omission of the procedures set forth in paragraph (a)(4)(ii) of this section when:

(A) The offset is in the nature of a recoupment;

(B) The debt arises under a contract as set forth in *Cecile Industries, Inc.* v. *Cheney*, 995 F.2d 1052 (Fed. Cir. 1993) (notice and other procedural protections set forth in 31 U.S.C. 3716(a) do not supplant or restrict established procedures for contractual offsets accommodated by the Contracts Disputes Act); or

(C) In the case of non-centralized administrative offsets conducted under paragraph (c) of this section, the agency first learns of the existence of the amount owed by the debtor when there is insufficient time before payment would be made to the debtor/payee to allow for prior notice and an opportunity for review. When prior notice and an opportunity for review are omitted, the agency shall give the debtor such notice and an opportunity for review as soon as practicable and shall promptly refund any money ultimately found not to have been owed to the Government.

(iv) When an agency previously has given a debtor any of the required notice and review opportunities with respect to a particular debt (see, e.g., § 901.2), the agency need not duplicate such notice and review opportunities before administrative offset may be initiated.

(5) Agencies referring delinquent debts to the Secretary must certify, in a form acceptable to the Secretary, that:

(i) The debt(s) is (are) past due and legally enforceable; and

(ii) The agency has complied with all due process requirements under 31 U.S.C. 3716(a) and the agency's regulations.

(6) Payments that are prohibited by law from being offset are exempt from centralized administrative offset. The Secretary shall exempt payments under means-tested programs from centralized administrative offset when requested in writing by the head of the payment certifying or authorizing agency. Also, the Secretary may exempt other classes of payments from

centralized offset upon the written request of the head of the payment certifying or authorizing agency.

(7) Benefit payments made under the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 301 *et seq.*), part B of the Black Lung Benefits Act (30 U.S.C. 921 *et seq.*), and any law administered by the Railroad Retirement Board (other than tier 2 benefits), may be offset only in accordance with Treasury regulations, issued in consultation with the Social Security Administration, the Railroad Retirement Board, and the Office of Management and Budget. See 31 CFR 285.4.

(8) In accordance with 31 U.S.C. 3716(f), the Secretary may waive the provisions of the Computer Matching and Privacy Protection Act of 1988 concerning matching agreements and postmatch notification and verification (5 U.S.C. 552a(o) and (p)) for centralized administrative offset upon receipt of a certification from a creditor agency that the due process requirements enumerated in 31 U.S.C. 3716(a) have been met. The certification of a debt in accordance with paragraph (b)(5) of this section will satisfy this requirement. If such a waiver is granted, only the Data Integrity Board of the Department of the Treasury is required to oversee any matching activities, in accordance with 31 U.S.C. 3716(g). This waiver authority does not apply to offsets conducted under paragraphs (c) and (d) of this section.

(c) *Non-centralized administrative offset.* (1) Generally, non-centralized administrative offsets are *ad hoc* case-by-case offsets that an agency conducts, at the agency's discretion, internally or in cooperation with the agency certifying or authorizing payments to the debtor. Unless otherwise prohibited by law, when centralized administrative offset is not available or appropriate, past due, legally enforceable nontax delinquent debts may be collected through non-centralized administrative offset. In these cases, a creditor agency may make a request directly to a payment authorizing agency to offset a payment due a debtor to collect a delinquent debt. For example, it may be appropriate for a creditor agency to request that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) offset a Federal employee's lump sum payment upon leaving Government service to satisfy an unpaid advance.

(2) Before requesting a payment authorizing agency to conduct a non-centralized administrative offset, agencies must adopt regulations providing that such offsets may occur only after:

(i) The debtor has been provided due process as set forth in paragraph (b)(4) of this section; and

(ii) The payment authorizing agency has received written certification from the creditor agency that the debtor owes the past due, legally enforceable delinquent debt in the amount stated, and that the creditor agency has fully complied with its regulations concerning administrative offset.

(3) Payment authorizing agencies shall comply with offset requests by creditor agencies to collect debts owed to the United States, unless the offset would not be in the best interests of the United States with respect to the program of the payment authorizing agency, or would otherwise be contrary to law. Appropriate use should be made of the cooperative efforts of other agencies in effecting collection by administrative offset.

(4) When collecting multiple debts by non-centralized administrative offset, agencies should apply the recovered amounts to those debts in accordance with the best interests of the United States, as determined by the facts and circumstances of the particular case, particularly the applicable statute of limitations.

(d) *Requests to OPM to offset a debtor's anticipated or future benefit payments under the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund.* Upon providing OPM written certification that a debtor has been afforded the procedures provided in paragraph (b)(4) of this section, creditor agencies may request OPM to offset a debtor's anticipated or future benefit payments under the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund (Fund) in accordance with regulations codified at 5 CFR 831.1801–831.1808. Upon receipt of such a request, OPM will identify and ''flag'' a debtor's account in anticipation of the time when the debtor requests, or becomes eligible to receive, payments from the Fund. This will satisfy any requirement that offset be initiated prior to the expiration of

the time limitations referenced in paragraph (a)(4) of this section.

(e) *Review requirements.* (1) For purposes of this section, whenever an agency is required to afford a debtor a review within the agency, the agency shall provide the debtor with a reasonable opportunity for an oral hearing when the debtor requests reconsideration of the debt and the agency determines that the question of the indebtedness cannot be resolved by review of the documentary evidence, for example, when the validity of the debt turns on an issue of credibility or veracity.

(2) Unless otherwise required by law, an oral hearing under this section is not required to be a formal evidentiary hearing, although the agency should carefully document all significant matters discussed at the hearing.

(3) This section does not require an oral hearing with respect to debt collection systems in which a determination of indebtedness rarely involves issues of credibility or veracity and the agency has determined that review of the written record is ordinarily an adequate means to correct prior mistakes.

(4) In those cases when an oral hearing is not required by this section, an agency shall accord the debtor a ''paper hearing,'' that is, a determination of the request for reconsideration based upon a review of the written record.

§ 901.4 Reporting debts.

(a) Agencies shall develop and implement procedures for reporting delinquent debts to credit bureaus and other automated databases. Agencies also may develop procedures to report nondelinquent debts to credit bureaus. See 31 U.S.C. 3711(e).

(1) In developing procedures for reporting debts to credit bureaus, agencies shall comply with the Bankruptcy Code and the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 552a, as amended. The provisions of the Privacy Act do not apply to credit bureaus.

(2) Agency procedures for reporting delinquent consumer debts to credit bureaus shall be consistent with the due process and other requirements contained in 31 U.S.C. 3711(e). When an agency has given a debtor any of the required notice and review opportunities with respect to a particular debt, the agency need not duplicate such notice and review opportunities before reporting that delinquent consumer debt to credit bureaus.

(b) Agencies should report delinquent debts to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Credit Alert Interactive Voice Response System (CAIVRS). For information about the CAIVRS program, agencies should contact the Director of Information Resources Management Policy and Management Division, Office of Information Technology, Department of Housing and Urban Development, 451 7th Street, SW., Washington, DC 20410.

§ 901.5 Contracting with private collection contractors and with entities that locate and recover unclaimed assets.

(a) Subject to the provisions of paragraph (b) of this section, Federal agencies may contract with private collection contractors, as defined in 31 U.S.C. 3701(f), to recover delinquent debts provided that:

(1) Agencies retain the authority to resolve disputes, compromise debts, suspend or terminate collection activity, and refer debts for litigation;

(2) The private collection contractor is not allowed to offer the debtor, as an incentive for payment, the opportunity to pay the debt less the private collection contractor's fee unless the agency has granted such authority prior to the offer;

(3) The contract provides that the private collection contractor is subject to the Privacy Act of 1974 to the extent specified in 5 U.S.C. 552a(m), and to applicable Federal and state laws and regulations pertaining to debt collection practices, including but not limited to the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, 15 U.S.C. 1692; and

(4) The private collection contractor is required to account for all amounts collected.

(b) Agencies shall use governmentwide debt collection contracts to obtain debt collection services provided by private collection contractors. However, agencies may refer debts to private collection contractors pursuant to a contract between the agency and the private collection contractor only if