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The IRS has selected four private companies to assist with tax collections during the

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Accordingly, the IRS has designated the following four companies to spring into action this tax-filing season. They are: (1) Conserve, Fairport, New York; (2). Pioneer, Horseheads, New York; (3) Performant, Livermore, California; and (4) CBE Group, Cedar Falls, Iowa. One of these companies may be assigned your case if you owe the IRS money, but it's no longer actively pursuing the debt. The private firms are still required to respect all the usual taxpayer rights and properly identify themselves as contractors responsible for collecting taxes.

There should be plenty of warning. The IRS will provide taxpayers and their representatives written notice that their account is being transferred to a private collection agency. Then the firm will send a follow-up letter to the taxpayer, and their personal representatives, confirming the transfer. No one will be ambushed by a surprise knock on the door or a demanding phone call.

Furthermore, the new program for the four private companies is limited to certain cases. Specifically, the IRS won't assign a debt to one of these outfits if the taxpayer is:

- Deceased;
- Under age 18;
- Serving in a designated combat zone;
- A victim of tax-related identity theft;
- Currently under IRS examination, litigation, criminal investigation or levy;
- Subject to pending or an active offer in compromise (OIC);
- Subject to an installment agreement;

- Subject to a right of appeal;

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to a private collection agency.

Don't try to dodge the IRS or a private collection firm if you owe back taxes. Consult with a CPA who can provide guidance on options such as installment plans and OICs. And, finally, watch out for imposters. Report any suspicious activity immediately to the IRS.

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