

IRS Not Answering Their Phones

Cross References

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The Taxpayer Advocate Service (TAS) is an independent organization within the IRS with a mission to help taxpayers resolve problems and recommend changes to IRS processes and procedures that will prevent problems. According to the TAS website, it strives to ensure that every taxpayer is treated fairly and knows and understands their rights.

The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) received a concern regarding the service provided on a local TAS telephone line. Specifically, a tax practitioner stated that their local TAS office had not responded to correspondence sent to the office six weeks prior for a client who was due a refund and was claiming a financial hardship. The tax practitioner also noted they had left a message on the local TAS telephone line and did not receive a call back and in two subsequent calls, they received a message that the voicemail box was full.

The inability for taxpayers to reach a TAS representative when contacting their local TAS office may discourage taxpayers from seeking help with their tax issues, being compliant with the tax system, and not receiving the assistance they deserve in resolving their tax issues.

What TIGTA found. A TIGTA evaluation identified that local TAS telephone lines were not consistent in providing taxpayers the ability to speak with a TAS representative. TIGTA called all 76 local TAS telephone lines in the United States, including offices in the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, using the telephone numbers listed on the TAS and IRS website.

The calls found some telephone lines were not in service, voicemail boxes were full, and inconsistent recorded scripted messaging and callback time frames. Only two telephone lines were answered by a TAS representative. Voicemail prompts indicated that callbacks would be received within time frames ranging from one business day to four weeks.

Additionally, TIGTA found several discrepancies between what was listed on the TAS website and the IRS website when comparing contact information for telephone numbers, fax lines, and local addresses. TIGTA also identified voicemail messaging that had significant differences in the information being communicated and in three instances referenced the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic.

What TIGTA recommended. TIGTA issued an e-mail alert during this evaluation alerting TAS management of the need to provide consistency in telephone messaging, the need to ensure that the TAS and IRS websites have up-to-date local TAS office information posted and ensure that voicemail boxes are properly monitored throughout the day to avoid mailboxes filling up. TAS management partially agreed with the TIGTA recommendations and took corrective actions to make changes to voicemail messages, made updates to the IRS and TAS websites, and provide more consistent information to taxpayers. However, TAS management indicated it has limited staffing to fully agree to all the recommendations.