

April 11, 2016

The Honorable John Koskinen  
Commissioner  
Internal Revenue Service  
1111 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20224

Dear Commissioner Koskinen:

For several years, the IRS has worked with the Federal Trade Commission and other public sector partners to make consumers aware of scam phone calls from thieves posing as IRS agents. According to a Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration report, this scam, which targeted hundreds of thousands of individuals, cost victims over \$23 million in less than two years. To combat the scam, the IRS conveyed a consistent message to taxpayers that the IRS will not call you to demand immediate payment of taxes. Headlines from national press stories, including one published by CNBC in October 2015, warn the public "Guess What! That's NOT the IRS Calling."

This consistent message has been upended with two changes in law at the end of last year. In December, as part of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, Congress passed into law a requirement that the IRS employ private debt collectors to collect delinquent income taxes. A month earlier, as part of the budget deal, Congress enacted legislation allowing robocalls to be used for collections of government debt. Sometime in the near future, debt collection centers under government contract will be tasked with collecting unpaid taxes from individual taxpayers. These private debt collectors call, or perhaps even robocall, individuals at their home and place of work to demand payment of overdue income taxes.

I am concerned that a new program that gives the green light to legitimate and authorized debt collectors will only serve to confuse vulnerable individuals. How will an individual know whether a caller claiming to represent the IRS is a scam artist or a government contractor? While this change in policy may lead to an increase in tax collections, I have very serious concerns that it will only further embolden the scam artists who already prey on individuals by impersonating IRS agents.

Given the deep concerns Americans have about identity theft, it is essential that the IRS take care in implementing a program that could lead to confusion. Please provide details about how the IRS intends to partner with other federal agencies and the private sector to continue to warn individuals about the IRS phone scam, which continues to threaten individuals in Missouri and across the country, as it puts this program into place. Please also provide information about how the IRS will implement the private debt collection program so that individuals can know that the caller on the other end of the line is actually with the IRS.

Thank you for your cooperation on this matter during this busy tax filing season

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Claire McCaskill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Claire" written in a large, rounded script, and "McCaskill" following in a similar but slightly more compact style.

Claire McCaskill  
United States Senator