

DEPARTMENT OF STATE REVENUE

03-20080227P; 03-20080340 LOF

Letter of Findings: 08-0227P; 08-0340
Withholding Tax
For the Years 2003 and 2004

NOTICE: Under IC § 4-22-7-7, this document is required to be published in the Indiana Register and is effective on its date of publication. It shall remain in effect until the date it is superseded or deleted by the publication of a new document in the Indiana Register. The publication of the document will provide the general public with information about the Department's official position concerning a specific issue.

ISSUE**I. Withholding Tax – Tax and Twenty-Percent Penalty.**

Authority: IC § 2-5-3-1; IC § 6-3-2-2.8; IC § 6-3-4-13; IC § 6-8.1-5-1; IC § 6-8.1-10-2.1; [45 IAC 15-11-2](#).

The taxpayer seeks abatement of an assessment for withholding tax along with the twenty-percent penalty for failure to file Form WH-1s and remit withholding tax on behalf of its non-resident shareholders.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

Taxpayer is an out-of-state business entity conducting business both inside and outside Indiana. Taxpayer was assessed for withholding tax and for associated penalties. Believing that it was not responsible for either the tax or the penalty, taxpayer protested. An administrative hearing was conducted and this Letter of Findings results.

I. Withholding Tax – Tax and Twenty-Percent Penalty.**DISCUSSION**

Taxpayer points out that it elected federal S corporation status and its income is not subject to federal or state income tax. Taxpayer indicates that it was acquired by its current shareholders "shortly after December 31, 2004." However, taxpayer admits that the former shareholders failed to file Indiana income tax returns. Taxpayer argues that it should not be required to pay the income tax because the former shareholders should not be absolved of their personal filing requirements. According to taxpayer's current shareholders, the responsibility for the unpaid tax and penalty rests with the former shareholders.

In addition, taxpayer argues that it is entitled to abatement of the twenty-percent penalty for failure to file Form WH-1s and remit withholding tax on behalf of its non-resident shareholders.

Under IC § 6-8.1-5-1(b), "The burden of proving that the proposed assessment is wrong rests with the person against whom the proposed assessment is made." An assessment – including the negligence penalty – is presumptively valid.

The Indiana law governing the initial withholding requirement, ultimate responsibility for any unpaid tax, and the associated penalty for failure to withhold is as follows. IC § 6-3-2-2.8 states in part as follows:

Notwithstanding any provision of [IC 6-3-1](#) through [IC 6-3-7](#), there shall be no tax on the adjusted gross income of the following:

(1) Any organization described in Section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code, except that any income of such organization which is subject to income tax under the Internal Revenue Code shall be subject to the tax under [IC 6-3-1](#) through [IC 6-3-7](#).

(2) Any corporation which is exempt from income tax under Section 1363 of the Internal Revenue Code and which complies with the requirements of [IC 6-3-4-13](#). However, income of a corporation described under this subdivision that is subject to income tax under the Internal Revenue Code is subject to the tax under [IC 6-3-1](#) through [IC 6-3-7](#). A corporation will not lose its exemption under this section because it fails to comply with [IC 6-3-4-13](#) but it will be subject to the penalties provided by [IC 6-8.1-10](#). (Emphasis added).

According to IC § 6-3-4-13:

(a) Every corporation which is exempt from tax under [IC 6-3](#) pursuant to [IC 6-3-2-2.8](#)(2) shall, at the time that it pays or credits amounts to any of its nonresident shareholders as dividends or as their share of the corporation's undistributed taxable income, withhold the amount prescribed by the department. **Such corporation so paying or crediting any nonresident shareholder:**

(1) shall be liable to the state of Indiana for the payment of the tax required to be withheld under this section and shall not be liable to such shareholder for the amount withheld and paid over in compliance or intended compliance with this section; and

(2) when the aggregate amount due under [IC 6-3](#) and [IC 6-3.5](#) exceeds one hundred fifty dollars (\$150) per quarter, then such corporation shall make return and payment to the department quarterly, on such dates and in such manner as the department shall prescribe, of the amount of tax which, under [IC 6-3](#) and [IC 6-3.5](#), it is required to withhold.

(b) Every corporation shall, at the time of each payment made by it to the department pursuant to this section, deliver to the department a return upon such form as shall be prescribed by the department showing the total amounts paid or credited to its nonresident shareholders, the amount withheld in accordance with

the provisions of this section, and such other information as the department may require. Every corporation withholding as provided in this section shall furnish to its nonresident shareholders annually, but not later than the fifteenth day of the third month after the end of its taxable year, a record of the amount of tax withheld on behalf of such shareholders on forms to be prescribed by the department.

(c) All money withheld by a corporation, pursuant to this section, shall immediately upon being withheld be the money of the state of Indiana and every corporation which withholds any amount of money under the provisions of this section shall hold the same in trust for the state of Indiana and for payment thereof to the department in the manner and at the times provided in [IC 6-3](#). Any corporation may be required to post a surety bond in such sum as the department shall determine to be appropriate to protect the state of Indiana with respect to money withheld pursuant to this section.

(d) The provisions of [IC 6-8.1](#) relating to additions to tax in case of delinquency and penalties shall apply to corporations subject to the provisions of this section, and for these purposes any amount withheld, or required to be withheld and remitted to the department under this section, shall be considered to be the tax of the corporation, and with respect to such amount it shall be considered the taxpayer.

(e) Amounts withheld from payments or credits to a nonresident shareholder during any taxable year of the corporation in accordance with the provisions of this section shall be considered to be a part payment of the tax imposed on such nonresident shareholder for his taxable year within or with which the corporation's taxable year ends. A return made by the corporation under subsection (b) shall be accepted by the department as evidence in favor of the nonresident shareholder of the amount so withheld from the shareholder's distributive share.

(f) This section shall in no way relieve any nonresident shareholder from the shareholder's obligation of filing a return or returns at the time required under [IC 6-3](#) or [IC 6-3.5](#), and any unpaid tax shall be paid at the time prescribed by section 5 of this chapter.

(g) Instead of the reporting periods required under subsection (a), the department may permit a corporation to file one (1) return and payment each year if the corporation pays or credits amounts to its nonresident shareholders only one (1) time each year. The withholding return and payment are due on or before the fifteenth day of the third month after the end of the taxable year of the corporation.

(h) If a distribution will be made with property other than money or a gain is realized without the payment of money, the corporation shall not release the property or credit the gain until it has funds sufficient to enable it to pay the tax required to be withheld under this section. If necessary, the corporation shall obtain such funds from the shareholders.

(i) If a corporation fails to withhold and pay any amount of tax required to be withheld under this section and thereafter the tax is paid by the shareholders, such amount of tax as paid by the shareholders shall not be collected from the corporation but it shall not be relieved from liability for interest or penalty otherwise due in respect to such failure to withhold under [IC 6-8.1-10](#).

(j) A corporation described in subsection (a) may file a composite adjusted gross income tax return on behalf of some or all nonresident shareholders if it complies with the requirements prescribed by the department for filing a composite return. **(Emphasis added).**

IC § 6-8.1-10-2.1 states:

(a) If a person:

- (1) fails to file a return for any of the listed taxes;
- (2) fails to pay the full amount of tax shown on the person's return on or before the due date for the return or payment;
- (3) incurs, upon examination by the department, a deficiency that is due to negligence;
- (4) fails to timely remit any tax held in trust for the state; or
- (5) is required to make a payment by electronic funds transfer (as defined in [IC 4-8.1-2-7](#)), overnight courier, or personal delivery and the payment is not received by the department by the due date in funds acceptable to the department;

the person is subject to a penalty.

(b) Except as provided in subsection (g), the penalty described in subsection (a) is ten percent (10 [percent]) of:

- (1) the full amount of the tax due if the person failed to file the return;
- (2) the amount of the tax not paid, if the person filed the return but failed to pay the full amount of the tax shown on the return;
- (3) the amount of the tax held in trust that is not timely remitted;
- (4) the amount of deficiency as finally determined by the department; or
- (5) the amount of tax due if a person failed to make payment by electronic funds transfer, overnight courier, or personal delivery by the due date.

(c) For purposes of this section, the filing of a substantially blank or unsigned return does not constitute a return.

(d) If a person subject to the penalty imposed under this section can show that the failure to file a return, pay

the full amount of tax shown on the person's return, timely remit tax held in trust, or pay the deficiency determined by the department was due to reasonable cause and not due to willful neglect, the department shall waive the penalty.

(e) A person who wishes to avoid the penalty imposed under this section must make an affirmative showing of all facts alleged as a reasonable cause for the person's failure to file the return, pay the amount of tax shown on the person's return, pay the deficiency, or timely remit tax held in trust, in a written statement containing a declaration that the statement is made under penalty of perjury. The statement must be filed with the return or payment within the time prescribed for protesting departmental assessments. A taxpayer may also avoid the penalty imposed under this section by obtaining a ruling from the department before the end of a particular tax period on the amount of tax due for that tax period.

(f) The department shall adopt rules under [IC 4-22-2](#) to prescribe the circumstances that constitute reasonable cause and negligence for purposes of this section.

(g) A person who fails to file a return for a listed tax that shows no tax liability for a taxable year, other than an information return (as defined in section 6 of this chapter), on or before the due date of the return shall pay a penalty of ten dollars (\$10) for each day that the return is past due, up to a maximum of two hundred fifty dollars (\$250).

(h) A corporation which otherwise qualifies under [IC 6-3-2-2.8\(2\)](#) but fails to withhold and pay any amount of tax required to be withheld under [IC 6-3-4-13](#) shall pay a penalty equal to twenty percent (20 [percent]) of the amount of tax required to be withheld under [IC 6-3-4-13](#). This penalty shall be in addition to any penalty imposed by section 6 of this chapter. (Emphasis added).

Departmental regulation [45 IAC 15-11-2\(b\)](#) defines negligence as "the failure to use such reasonable care, caution, or diligence as would be expected of an ordinary reasonable taxpayer." Negligence is to "be determined on a case-by-case basis according to the facts and circumstances of each taxpayer." *Id.*

IC § 6-8.1-10-2.1(d) allows the Department to waive the penalty upon a showing that the failure to pay the deficiency was based on "reasonable cause and not due to willful neglect." Departmental regulation [45 IAC 15-11-2](#) requires that in order to establish "reasonable cause," the taxpayer must demonstrate that it "exercised ordinary business care and prudence in carrying out or failing to carry out a duty giving rise to the penalty imposed...."

The Indiana General Assembly has provided guidance as to the manner in which state tax laws are to be applied. Pursuant to IC § 2-5-3-1:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the general assembly of the state of Indiana to promote a revenue raising structure in Indiana that will provide adequate revenues to carry on the efficient operation of the state, county, and city governments and at the same time will assure that its burdens will be shared equitably by all taxpayers. It is further declared to be the policy of the general assembly of the state of Indiana to encourage and bring about the accomplishment of enforcement policies and administrative practices that will result in maximum return from existing taxes to the state of Indiana at a minimum cost to the taxpayers.

In imposing the twenty-percent penalty for failure to file Form WH-1 and remit withholding tax on non-resident shareholders the Department is enforcing a provision of the Indiana Code in order to ensure the continued compliance with Indiana law. The requirement of filing a Form WH-1 and the responsibility for withholding on the taxpayer's non-resident shareholder is the state's way of ensuring that the Department is provided with information it needs to carry out its objectives in the most efficient manner. The withholding requirements imposed upon the taxpayer in this instance are more efficient than the unreasonably burdensome method of the Department attempting to match non-resident shareholders to their respective S corporations in order to ensure that voluntary compliance with the Indiana tax laws has occurred.

The taxpayer's current shareholders argue that the Department should seek payment of the unpaid tax from the previous shareholders and that it is those previous shareholders who bear sole responsibility for this unpaid tax. According to taxpayer, "The former shareholders clearly owe this income tax." The Department does not quarrel with this conclusion but the argument is somewhat besides the point because the proposed assessment was brought against taxpayer as the S corporation originally responsible for withholding these taxes. IC § 6-3-4-13(a) states that, "Every corporation which is exempt from tax under [IC 6-3](#) pursuant to [IC 6-3-2-2.8\(2\)](#) shall, at the time it pays or credits amounts to any of its nonresident shareholders as dividends or as their share of the corporation's undistributed taxable income, withhold the amount prescribed by the department. *Such corporation so paying or crediting any non resident shareholder: (1) shall be liable to the state of Indiana for the payment of the tax required to be withheld under this section and shall not be liable to such shareholder for the amount withheld and paid over in compliance or intended compliance with this section[.]*" (Emphasis added).

As the entity electing S corporation status, taxpayer took unto itself the responsibility of withholding tax on the dividends or undistributed income credited to its shareholders. Having failed to do so, the taxpayer has the statutory liability for now paying that overdue tax.

Taxpayer similarly argues that it should not be required to pay the associated twenty percent penalties. Taxpayer's current shareholders maintain that they – as the successor shareholders – are unduly burdened by the penalty because it was the former shareholders who acted negligently. The taxpayer – represented by the

current shareholders – argues that it was unaware of the former shareholders' failure to comply with the filing and withholding requirements and that "the current shareholders have had an excellent filing and payment record with the Department." Again, taxpayer's argument misses the mark. The penalty is not being assessed against the current shareholders; the penalty is being assessed against taxpayer as the entity which was initially required to withhold but which abrogated that responsibility. The issue is whether taxpayer "exercised ordinary business care and prudence in carrying out or failing to carry out a duty giving rise to the penalty imposed...." [45 IAC 15-11-2\(c\)](#). Taxpayer failed to withhold the tax on behalf of its then current shareholders. There is nothing in the record which indicates that the S corporation (taxpayer) exercised ordinary business care of that the failure to withhold the taxes was attributable to "reasonable cause." IC § 6-8.1-10-2(d).

Taxpayer's current shareholders maintain that a decision requiring taxpayer to pay the tax and associated penalty is inequitable. According to taxpayer, "the assessment of this withholding tax against [taxpayer] under its current ownership is displacing the tax liability from the former shareholders to the current shareholders based on the former shareholders' taxable income.... [The current shareholders] feel this was not the intent of the statute." The Department must disagree believing that it was precisely the intent of the Indiana statute to mandate corporate responsibility for withholding the tax on behalf of its shareholders and to impose a monetary penalty for failure to do so.

FINDING

Taxpayer's protest is respectfully denied. Taxpayer – as an S corporation – owes both the tax and penalty.

Posted: 08/27/2008 by Legislative Services Agency
An [html](#) version of this document.