

Tax preparation during a government shutdown: Where do you turn?

Column

By Lauren Galley, Regional Director, Bryan/College Station Better Business Bureau

January 28th is quickly approaching, and you may want to mark your calendars, because that's the first day you can file for your 2018 tax returns. But, could the current partial government shutdown throw a wrench in your plans? It just might. You may not be able to reach IRS employees with your tax-related questions or if you need information verified, for example, when it comes to securing a loan, you might run into some problems getting ahold of someone. While you may not get answers from IRS representatives, you shouldn't wait to pay your taxes. They still need to be done on time!

Better Business Bureau (BBB) is a nonprofit organization, not a government agency. So, we are here to help get you on the right track! Of course, the first step is finding a tax preparer you can trust. Last year, BBB received nearly 3,000 complaints about tax-related services, slightly up from 2017. The most common complaints allege the tax preparer made errors resulting in fines and fees. Other complaints mentioned contract and billing issues, while some customer reviews related to bad customer service.

BBB has the following tips if you're in the market for a trustworthy tax preparer:

- **Research at bbb.org:** Visit BBB.org for a list of trustworthy tax preparation services. Review their complaint history and customer reviews to make sure they're a service you want to work with.
- **Check credentials:** Ideally, your tax preparer should either be a certified public accountant, tax attorney or enrolled agent. All three can represent you before the IRS in all matters, including audits.
- **Beware of BIG promises:** Be cautious around tax preparers promising larger refunds than the competition. Avoid any tax preparer who bases their fee on a percentage of your refund.
- **Consider accessibility:** Some tax preparation services only set up shop for the months leading up to April 15th. Beware of those temporary shops, because if the IRS finds errors and you get audited, you will need to be able to contact your preparer at any moment during the year.
- **Read the contract:** Make sure to read the tax preparation service contracts closely to ensure you understand issues such as cost for the service, how the cost will be affected if preparation is more complicated or time consuming than expected, and whether the tax preparer will represent you in the case of an audit.

For more information on finding a tax preparer you can trust, visit bbb.org.

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