
TREASURY INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR TAX ADMINISTRATION

Office of Inspections and Evaluations



*Selected Taxpayer Assistance Centers
Were Professional and Organized, and
Sensitive Information and Equipment
Were Properly Secured*

September 13, 2016

Reference Number: 2016-IE-R010

This report has cleared the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration disclosure review process and information determined to be restricted from public release has been redacted from this document.

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TREASURY INSPECTOR GENERAL
FOR TAX ADMINISTRATION

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20220

September 13, 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMISSIONER, WAGE AND INVESTMENT DIVISION

FROM: Gregory D. Kutz
Acting Deputy Inspector General for Inspections and Evaluations

SUBJECT: Final Inspection Report – Selected Taxpayer Assistance Centers Were Professional and Organized, and Sensitive Information and Equipment Were Properly Secured (#IE-16-001)

This report presents the results of our inspection to determine whether selected Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TAC) were professional and organized and whether sensitive information and equipment were properly secured in accordance with the standards established by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Wage and Investment Division's Field Assistance Office staff.

Synopsis

TACs traditionally provide taxpayers with face-to-face assistance to resolve tax issues, answer tax law questions, make adjustments to tax accounts, accept completed tax returns and payments, establish payment agreements for qualified individuals, and provide tax forms and publications. We found that the 33 TACs we visited were generally well organized and professional. The number of customers waiting for service varied significantly depending on whether or not the TAC accepted appointments. At three locations, we observed people in long lines waiting for assistance, and the lines limited entry and egress to the buildings.

At five TACs, some employees were not wearing the required name tags, and only seven TACs had all of the current versions of required signs displayed that provide information and directions to TAC customers. We found that the TAC employees adequately secured IRS stamps and other material required for document authentication at 31 TACs.

Recommendation

We are making no recommendations at this time.



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Response

IRS management reviewed the draft report, accepted it as written, and elected not to provide a formal written response.

If you have any questions about this report, you may contact me or Kevin P. Riley, Director, Inspections and Evaluations.

Attachments



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The TACs were professional and organized

Based on the factors included in our inspection, we determined that the staff and the appearance of the 33 TACs were generally professional and organized.¹

Flow of TAC Customers

The number of customers waiting for service varied significantly depending on whether or not the TAC accepted appointments.² We counted the number of customers waiting in line when we arrived at and departed from the 33 TACs for a total of 66 counts and found that the TACs that did not offer appointments had the highest number of taxpayers waiting for service. For the 18 TACs we inspected that did not offer appointments, we observed 25 or more customers waiting for service in 36 percent (13 of 36) of our counts. Whereas for the 15 TACs we inspected that did offer appointments, we observed four or less customers waiting for service in 80 percent (24 of 30) of our counts. Figure 1 documents the number of customers waiting for service for our 66 counts at the TACs with and without appointments.

***Figure 1: Number of Customers Waiting for Service During
Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) Inspections***

Number of Customers Waiting for Service	TACs Without Appointments		TACs With Appointments	
	Number of Counts	Percentage of Total Counts	Number of Counts	Percentage of Total Counts
0 to 4	7	19%	24	80%
5 to 9	1	3%	2	7%
10 to 14	7	19%	1	3%
15 to 19	4	11%	1	3%
20 to 24	4	11%	0	0%
25 or More	13	36%	2	7%
Total	36	100% ³	30	100%

Source: Observed by TIGTA inspectors during the TAC visits.

¹ We selected a judgmental nonprobability sample of 33 TAC locations. The sample results cannot be used to project to the entire population of TACs.

² In February 2015, the IRS conducted a test program in which some TACs began taking appointments with the expectation of eliminating long lines that sometimes occur at many TAC locations. The IRS indicated that appointments were implemented to offer a consistent level of service and continue to promote the use of online services before traveling to a TAC.

³ Total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.



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Figure 2 provides examples of the long lines we observed during our inspections.

Figure 2: Persons Waiting in Long Lines



Source: TIGTA observation of persons waiting outside of TAC sites.

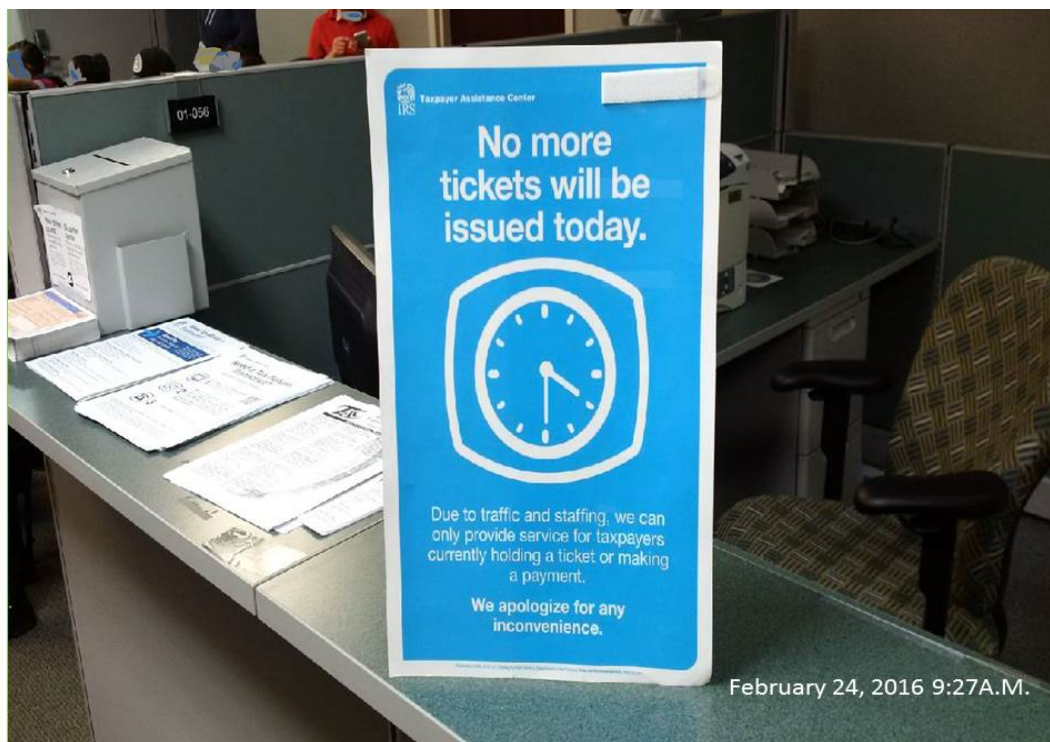


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We observed three TACs where the customers waiting for service limited the entry or egress to the buildings or the TAC offices. However, two of the 33 TACs we visited had an overflow room adjacent to the TAC, which helped reduce the number of customers waiting in hallways or outside the building and reduced the risk that customers would block entry or egress to the buildings and TAC offices.

According to the Internal Revenue Manual (IRM),⁴ Publication 5002, *Closing Notice Sign*, can be posted near the close of business if the manager determines the office cannot serve additional customers and no additional tickets will be issued for service due to high traffic volumes. After Publication 5002 is posted, the TAC will not provide service to customers unless they have a ticket. We noted that the manager or another TAC employee posted the sign at eight TACs that we inspected. At two of these TACs, we observed that the sign was displayed at approximately 9:30 a.m. and 10:25 a.m., respectively.

Figure 3: Closing Notice Sign Posted at Approximately 9:30 A.M.



Source: TIGTA observation at TAC site.

⁴ The IRM is the IRS's primary official source of instructions to staff related to the administration and operations of the IRS. It contains the directions employees need to carry out their operational responsibilities.



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Signs

Signs in the TAC provide directions and information to TAC customers. The IRM requires that the TACs display the latest revision of “Required Signs” and remove outdated versions when the revisions are received. However, we found that only seven (21 percent) of the 33 TACs inspected displayed the current version of all required signs applicable to them. The number of signs required in each TAC is dependent on the services offered in that particular location. Figure 4 documents the signs that were not displayed or were outdated.

Figure 4: Missing or Outdated Signs

Publication (Pub.) Number	Number of the TACs With Missing or Outdated Signs	Description
Pub. 4053, <i>Civil Rights Are Protected Poster for IRS Conducted Programs</i>	4 of 33	Advises that the IRS prohibits discrimination against taxpayers on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, reprisal, age, or sex by its employees in IRS-conducted programs.
Pub. 4920, <i>No Time to Wait? Facilitated Self-Assistance Information Card</i>	6 of 9	Provides customers information on the Facilitated Self-Assistance (FSA) options available.
Pub. 4958, <i>Virtual Service Delivery: IRS Taxpayer Assistance Offered Here Poster</i>	1 of 1	Indicates virtual services are available at this location.
Pub. 4959, <i>Virtual Service Delivery: IRS Taxpayer Assistance Offered Here</i>	1 of 1	Directs customers to the kiosk.
Pub. 4992, <i>Prohibited Items Poster</i>	8 of 33	Lists items (weapons, camera, <i>etc.</i>) not allowed in the TACs.
Pub. 4994, <i>Controlled Access Wall Sign</i>	4 of 33	Specifies controlled access areas in the TACs.
Pub. 4995, <i>We Can Help With Poster</i>	16 of 33	Informs customers of the services provided by the TAC.
Pub. 4996, <i>Making A Payment – No Cash Accepted</i>	7 of 14	Notifies customers that the TAC does not accept cash payments and receipts will not be issued for noncash payments.



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Publication (Pub.) Number	Number of the TACs With Missing or Outdated Signs	Description
Pub. 4997, <i>Making A Payment – Cash Accepted</i>	8 of 19	Notifies customers that the office accepts cash payments.
Pub. 4998, <i>No Return Preparation Services Poster</i>	7 of 33	Notifies customers that no tax preparation services are offered.
Pub. 5004, <i>Your Contact Will Be Recorded, Desktop Sign</i>	2 of 33	Notifies customers that their conversations will be recorded for quality and training purposes.
Pub. 5037, <i>Facilitated Self-Assistance Poster</i>	2 of 9	Poster explains FSA, what services are available, and how to begin using the service.
Pub. 5100, <i>Affordable Care Act Information Poster for Field Assistance Tax Assistance Center</i>	5 of 33	Provides links and codes that will guide taxpayers to websites with information about the Affordable Care Act, resources for insurance and financial assistance, and facts about how the Affordable Care Act will affect tax returns.
Pub. 5134, <i>Service Approach Counter Sign</i>	5 of 14	Notifies the public to changes in services provided by the TACs and offers alternative methods of receiving help and information.
Pub. 5169, <i>Taxpayer Bill Of Rights</i>	1 of 33	Lists the 10 taxpayer rights.

Source: TIGTA observations at TAC sites and IRS Product Catalog information.

The Director, Field Assistance, or designee must approve the display of signs that are not required by the IRM, and all signs displayed in the TACs must adhere to IRS design guidelines. Additionally, handwritten signs should not be displayed in the TACs. However, we found that unapproved signs and handwritten signs were displayed in five of 33 TACs we inspected. Figure 5 provides examples of unapproved signs and handwritten signs identified during our inspection.



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Figure 5: Unapproved and Handwritten Signs



Source: Photographs taken by TIGTA inspectors during TAC visits.

Name Tags

Each TAC employee who provides face-to-face assistance to taxpayers must wear a name tag that displays the employee's name and employee identification number;⁵ however, at five of 33 sites we visited, some TAC employees were not wearing their name tags. This includes the TACs where name tags had not been issued for new employees as of the date of our visit. At one TAC, the individual taxpayer advisory specialist (ITAS) printed the employee's identifying information and placed it on the wall in view of the customers.

Headphones and Pneumatic Tables

The TACs that offer customers the option to use FSA kiosks to accomplish tasks should maintain a small inventory of headphones for taxpayers' one-time use. However, we found that headphones were not available at four of nine FSA TACs we visited. In addition, the equipment

⁵ IRM 21.3.4.3.3(1) (Feb. 24, 2011) and IRM 1.4.11.4.1.2.1 (Nov. 8, 2010).



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used for the FSA service was not located on a pneumatic table (computer table that can be adjusted using air pressure) as required at three of the nine TACs.

Sensitive information and equipment were protected

We found that TAC employees adequately secured IRS stamps at 31 of 33 TACs we inspected.⁶ However, some stamps were left out unattended on the desk in the ITAS work cubicles at two of 33 TACs. While materials required for document authentication were properly secured at most of the TACs inspected,⁷ in one TAC, authentication equipment was not secured in a locked container. All personal authentication equipment, tools, and resource material used by the TACs to provide document authentication services kept at the ITAS workstation must be kept in a locked container when not in use.

⁶ Official IRS stamps include: United States Treasury, Received, Received with Remittance, Proof of Delivery Only–Not an Official Receipt, and the Area Director’s signature stamp.

⁷ The ITASs at some TACs perform document authentication of original passports and national identity cards so that individuals can apply for an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (which is used for Federal tax purposes by taxpayers who are not eligible for a Social Security Number) without leaving their original documents with the IRS.



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Attachment 1

*Inspection Checklist¹
(With Results From the 33 TACs Inspected)*

	Question	Yes	No	NA
1	Was the TAC well organized and professional?	33		
2	Are all TAC office entrances and exits unobstructed by taxpayers waiting for service? If no, please describe.	30	3	
3	Are employees assigned to the TAC wearing a name tag?	28	5	
4	Does the TAC offer Contact Recording?	33		
4a	If so, is there a Publication 5004, <i>Your Contact Will Be Recorded</i> , (dated 3-2012) at each ITAS station to indicate that conversations will be recorded for quality and training purposes?	31	2	
5	Is a supply of survey cards maintained on-site?	33		
6	If there is no Initial Assistance Representative or taxpayers take tickets themselves, is Publication 5134, <i>Service Approach Counter Sign</i> , (dated 1-2014) posted?	9	5	19
6a	Is Publication 5100, <i>Affordable Care Act</i> , (dated 8-2014) posted?	28	5	
6b	Is Publication 5169, <i>Taxpayer Bill Of Rights</i> , (dated 7-2014) posted?	32	1	
7	Is Publication 5002, <i>Closing Early—No More Tickets Issued Today</i> , (dated 3-2012) posted? (Used to assist with high traffic volume near the close of the day if the manager determines the office cannot serve additional customers and no more tickets will be issued.)	8	25	
7b	Is Publication 4992, <i>Prohibited Items Poster</i> , (dated 10-2014) posted?	25	8	
7c	Is Publication 4994, <i>Controlled Access Wall Sign</i> , (dated 3-2012) posted?	28	4	1

¹ The table only includes the results related to customer service for the TACs. We reported the results related to security standards for the TACs in a separate report. We did not report the results for questions 16a through 16c because the applicable forms and publications were not required by Field Assistance.



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	Question	Yes	No	NA
7d	Is Publication 4995, <i>We Can Help With Poster</i> , (dated 1-2014) posted?	17	16	
7e	Is Publication 4997, <i>Making A Payment Poster – Cash Accepted</i> , (dated 12-2014) posted?	11	8	14 ²
7f	Is Publication 4998, <i>No Return Preparation Services Poster</i> , (dated 3-2012) posted?	26	7	
7g	Is Publication 4053, <i>Civil Rights Are Protected Poster for IRS Conducted Programs</i> , (dated 4-2015) posted?	29	4	
7h	Is Publication 5202, <i>Appointment Only Poster for Field Assistance Taxpayer Assistance Centers</i> , (dated 8-2015) posted? <u>Note: This publication only applies to the TACs that take customers by appointment.</u>	15		18
8	Do the times on IRS.gov correspond to hours shown on Form 13358, <i>Taxpayer Assistance Center Hours of Operation</i> , (dated 12-2014)?	32		1
9	Is the TAC free of handwritten signs? The Field Assistance Office prohibits handwritten signs.	28	5	
10	Does the TAC have Qmatic (the queuing management system)?	33		
10a	Is Qmatic being used? If not, why?	33		
10b	Is Form 13864, <i>Field Assistance Contact Sheet</i> , used when Qmatic is offline?			33
11	Is there FSA?	9	24	
11a	If so, is a Field Assistance employee assisting taxpayers in using FSA?	6	3	24
	For the TACs using FSA, are the following signs posted:			
11b	Publication 4920, <i>No Time to Wait</i> , (dated 8-2012) FSA Card?	3	6	24
11c	Publication 5037, <i>Facilitated Self-Assistance Poster</i> , (dated 8-2012)?	7	2	24
11d	Is at least one FSA kiosk designated Section 508 compliant?	9		24

² This number (14) includes one TAC that did not accept cash payments but displayed an outdated version of Publication 4997.



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11e	If you answered yes to the previous question, is the equipment located on a pneumatic table?	6	3	24
11f	Are “one-time use only” headphones in stock for use with FSA?	5	4	24
12	Does the TAC have Virtual Services Delivery? ³	6	27	
	If so, are the following signs posted:			
12a	Publication 4958, <i>Virtual Service Delivery: IRS Taxpayer Assistance Offered Here Poster</i> , (dated 5-2014)?		1	5 ⁴
12b	Publication 4959, <i>Virtual Service Delivery: IRS Taxpayer Assistance Offered Here</i> , (dated 9-2011)?		1	5 ⁵
13	Is there a payment drop box?		33	
14	Does the TAC accept cash?	19	14	
14a	If the TAC does not accept cash, does the TAC have a cash deviation?	14		
14b	Is Publication 4996, <i>Making A Payment – No Cash Accepted</i> , (dated 12-2014) posted?	7	7	19
15	Is a television present?	29	4	
15a	If yes, is an IRS informational message playing?	16	13 ⁶	
15b	If a cable or local television station is playing on the television, is the volume setting closed captioned or muted?			33
15c	If the previous response was yes, request a copy of the waiver that authorized the TAC to play cable or a local television station on the television.			33
18	Did you observe any official IRS stamps left out unattended? ⁷	2	31	

³ Virtual Services Delivery uses video conferencing technology to assist taxpayers at select TACs and IRS partner sites in an effort to provide alternative service delivery channels and address staffing and workload issues.

⁴ The publication is not required for the TAC receiving the Virtual Services Delivery.

⁵ The publication is not required for the TAC receiving the Virtual Services Delivery.

⁶ The televisions were not on at 13 TACs.

⁷ Official IRS stamps include: United States Treasury, Received, Received with Remittance, Proof of Delivery Only–Not an Official Receipt, and the Area Director’s signature stamp.



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	Question	Yes	No	NA
19	Form W-7, <i>Application for IRS Individual Taxpayer Identification Number</i> : Are all personal document authentication equipment, tools, and resource material kept in a locked container when not in use? This includes ID Checking Guide – United States (if have expired copy) or International, Jeweler’s Loupe, handheld blacklight/flashlight combo, Mexican Matricula Decoder, and the Department of Homeland Security’s Pocket Guide Reference to Document Security Features and Printing Techniques. (Question asked of half of the ITASs that were present at each TAC visited.)	27	1	5
20	If observed, was the document authentication process completed in accordance with IRM guidance?	10		23
20a	Are the ultraviolet lightbox document viewer and ID Checking Guide – International (after the December 31, 2014 edition) maintained out of sight of the taxpayer?	27		6
21	Are cash and 809 receipts (Form 809, <i>Receipt for Payment of Taxes</i>) secured in a metal cash box and the box secured in a locked metal container during duty hours? (Question asked of half of the ITASs present at the time of the TAC visit.)	19		14
22	If there is a smart safe, are the 809 receipts secured in a locked container?	18		15
22a	Is the 809 receipt book in a locked container when not in use?	19		14
22b	Are noncash payments and documents with Personally Identifiable Information secured in a metal lockable container during duty hours? (Question asked of half of the ITASs present at the time of the TAC visit.)	33		
22c	Are items received from taxpayers stored in a metal container/cabinet separate from employees’ personal belongings?	32	1	

Source: Observed by TIGTA inspectors during the TAC visits.



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Attachment 2

Taxpayer Assistance Centers Inspected

Large*	Medium*	Small*
Area One		
Hartford, Connecticut (A)	Wilmington, Delaware	New Haven, Connecticut (A)
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (A)	Cherry Hill, New Jersey (A)	Waterbury, Connecticut (A)
	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (A)	
Area Two		
	Charlotte, North Carolina	Greenville, North Carolina
	Raleigh, North Carolina	Huntington, West Virginia
	Charleston, West Virginia	Parkersburg, West Virginia
	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	Madison, Wisconsin (A)
Area Three		
Plantation, Florida (A)	Little Rock, Arkansas	Jonesboro, Arkansas
	Minneapolis, Minnesota	Fort Meyers, Florida
	St. Paul, Minnesota	
	Memphis, Tennessee	
Area Four		
Phoenix, Arizona	Tucson, Arizona	Mesa, Arizona
Denver, Colorado (A)		Colorado Springs, Colorado
Area Five		
Santa Ana, California (A)	Long Beach, California (A)	Bellevue, Washington (A)
Las Vegas, Nevada (A)	Tacoma, Washington (A)	
Seattle, Washington (A)		
*A small TAC has one to four ITAS positions, a medium TAC has five to nine ITAS positions, and a large TAC has 10 to 19 ITAS positions.		
A – Appointment-Service TAC		

Source: Observed by TIGTA inspectors during the TAC visits.



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Attachment 3

Background

IRS records show that the Field Assistance Office,¹ divided into five Area Offices, was responsible for 376 TACs as of December 2015. The TACs traditionally provide taxpayers with face-to-face assistance to resolve tax issues, answer tax law questions, make adjustments to tax accounts, accept completed tax returns and payments, establish payment agreements for qualified individuals, and provide tax forms and publications.

Beginning in February 2015, the IRS conducted a test program in which some TACs began taking appointments with the expectation of eliminating long lines that sometime occur at many TAC locations. The pilot began with 10 large TACs and expanded to include 14 medium TACs and 20 small TACs.² The IRS indicated that appointments were implemented to offer a consistent level of service and continue to promote the use of online services before traveling to a TAC. Taxpayers could count on service when they arrived for their appointment, with minimal waiting. When confirming an appointment, the scheduler should work with the taxpayers to determine whether face-to-face service is actually required to resolve the issue. This is intended to help educate taxpayers on faster and easier ways to get the help they need without traveling to a TAC and facing lengthy wait times.

This review was performed at the Field Assistance Office in Atlanta, Georgia, and in 33 TACs located nationwide during the period February through April 2016.³ The TACs were reviewed for compliance with the IRS's IRM requirements.⁴ We conducted this inspection in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*.

¹ The Field Assistance Office is located within the Wage and Investment Division, which is responsible for providing taxpayers top quality service by helping them understand and comply with applicable tax laws.

² A small TAC has one to four ITAS positions, a medium TAC has five to nine ITAS positions, and a large TAC has 10 to 19 ITAS positions.

³ We selected a judgmental nonprobability sample of 33 TAC locations. The sample results cannot be used to project to the entire population of the TACs.

⁴ The IRM is the IRS's primary official source of instructions to staff related to the administration and operations of the IRS. It contains the directions employees need to carry out their operational responsibilities.



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Washington, D.C. 20044-0589

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