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S. 2145

To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to permit the Secretary of the Treasury to issue prospective guidance clarifying the employment status of individuals for purposes of employment taxes and to prevent retroactive assessments with respect to such clarifications.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 1, 2012

Mr. KERRY (for himself, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. AKAKA, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. BROWN of Ohio, Mrs. BOXER, and Mr. DURBIN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Finance

A BILL

To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to permit the Secretary of the Treasury to issue prospective guidance clarifying the employment status of individuals for purposes of employment taxes and to prevent retroactive assessments with respect to such clarifications.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; FINDINGS; PURPOSES.**

4 (a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the
5 “Fair Playing Field Act of 2012”.

1 (b) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following find-
2 ings:

3 (1) In 1978, Congress was concerned that lack
4 of clarity as to the proper classification of some
5 workers, increased IRS enforcement activity, and
6 retroactive application by IRS of interpretations that
7 were arguably new had caused hardships for some
8 small businesses and other taxpayers and confusion
9 as to the applicable rules.

10 (2) To allow time to develop a comprehensive
11 approach to the problem, Congress enacted section
12 530 of the Revenue Act of 1978 as an interim meas-
13 ure protecting taxpayers from liability for
14 misclassification if the taxpayer has a reasonable
15 basis for classifying a worker as an independent con-
16 tractor and meets certain other conditions. In addi-
17 tion, the Act prohibited the Secretary of the Treas-
18 ury from publishing regulations or revenue rulings
19 on workers' employment tax status pending the ex-
20 pected near-term enactment of clarifying legislation.

21 (3) During the ensuing 33 years, Congress
22 made section 530 of the Revenue Act of 1978 per-
23 manent, however, changes in working relationships
24 and the continued prohibition on new guidance have

1 increased the uncertainty as to the proper classifica-
2 tion of workers.

3 (4) Many workers are properly classified as
4 independent contractors. In other instances, workers
5 who are employees are being treated as independent
6 contractors. Such misclassification for tax purposes
7 contributes to inequities in the competitive positions
8 of businesses and to the Federal and State tax gap,
9 and may also result in misclassification for other
10 purposes, such as denial of unemployment benefits,
11 workplace health and safety protections, and retire-
12 ment or other benefits or protections available to
13 employees.

14 (5) Workers, businesses, and other taxpayers
15 will benefit from clear guidance regarding employ-
16 ment tax status. In the interest of fairness and in
17 view of many service recipients' reliance on current
18 section 530, such guidance should apply only pro-
19 spectively.

20 (c) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this Act are to per-
21 mit the Secretary of the Treasury to provide guidance al-
22 lowing workers and businesses to clearly understand the
23 proper federal tax classification of workers and to provide
24 relief allowing an orderly transition to new rules designed
25 to increase certainty and uniformity of treatment.

1 **SEC. 2. AUTHORITY TO ISSUE GUIDANCE CLARIFYING EM-**
2 **PLOYMENT STATUS FOR PURPOSES OF EM-**
3 **PLOYMENT TAXES.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 25 of the Internal Rev-
5 enue Code of 1986 is amended by adding at the end the
6 following new section:

7 **“SEC. 3511. AUTHORITY TO ISSUE GUIDANCE CLARIFYING**
8 **EMPLOYMENT STATUS.**

9 “(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall issue such
10 regulations or other guidance as the Secretary determines
11 to be necessary or appropriate to clarify the proper em-
12 ployment status of individuals for purposes of any tax im-
13 posed by this subtitle.

14 “(b) PROHIBITION ON RETROACTIVE ASSESS-
15 MENTS.—

16 “(1) IN GENERAL.—If—

17 “(A) for purposes of any tax imposed by
18 this subtitle, the taxpayer did not treat an indi-
19 vidual as an employee for any period before the
20 reclassification date with respect to such indi-
21 vidual, and

22 “(B) in the case of periods after December
23 31, 1978, and before such reclassification date,
24 all Federal tax returns (including information
25 returns) required to be filed by the taxpayer
26 with respect to such individual for such period

1 are filed on a basis consistent with the tax-
2 payer’s treatment of such individual as not
3 being an employee,
4 then, for purposes of applying such taxes for periods
5 before such reclassification date with respect to the
6 taxpayer, the individual shall be deemed not to be an
7 employee unless the taxpayer had no reasonable
8 basis for not treating such individual as an em-
9 ployee.

10 “(2) STATUTORY STANDARDS PROVIDING ONE
11 METHOD OF SATISFYING THE REQUIREMENTS OF
12 PARAGRAPH (1).—For purposes of paragraph (1), a
13 taxpayer shall in any case be treated as having a
14 reasonable basis for not treating an individual as an
15 employee for a period if the taxpayer’s treatment of
16 such individual for such period was in reasonable re-
17 liance on any of the following:

18 “(A) Judicial precedent, published rulings,
19 technical advice with respect to the taxpayer, or
20 a letter ruling to the taxpayer.

21 “(B) A past Internal Revenue Service
22 audit of the taxpayer in which there was no as-
23 sessment attributable to the treatment (for pur-
24 poses of any tax imposed by this subtitle) of the

1 individuals holding positions substantially simi-
2 lar to the position held by such individual.

3 “(C) Long-standing recognized practice of
4 a significant segment of the industry in which
5 such individual was engaged.

6 “(3) CONSISTENCY REQUIRED IN THE CASE OF
7 PRIOR TAX TREATMENT.—Paragraph (1) shall not
8 apply with respect to the treatment of any individual
9 (hereafter in this paragraph referred to as the re-
10 classified individual) for purposes of any tax im-
11 posed by this subtitle for any period ending after
12 December 31, 1978, if the taxpayer (or a prede-
13 cessor) has treated any individual holding a substan-
14 tially similar position as an employee for purposes of
15 any tax imposed by this subtitle for any period be-
16 ginning after December 31, 1977, and ending before
17 the reclassification date with respect to such reclas-
18 sified individual.

19 “(c) DEFINITIONS.—For purposes of this section—

20 “(1) RECLASSIFICATION DATE.—

21 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The term ‘reclassifica-
22 tion date’ means, with respect to any individual,
23 the earlier of—

24 “(i) the first day of the first calendar
25 quarter beginning more than 180 days

1 after the date of an employee classification
2 determination with respect to such indi-
3 vidual, or

4 “(ii) the effective date of the first ap-
5 plicable final regulation issued by the Sec-
6 retary under subsection (a) with respect to
7 such individual (or, if later, the first day of
8 the first calendar quarter beginning more
9 than 180 days after such regulation is
10 issued).

11 “(B) EMPLOYEE CLASSIFICATION DETER-
12 MINATION.—The term ‘employee classification
13 determination’ means, with respect to any indi-
14 vidual, a determination by the Secretary, in
15 connection with an audit of the taxpayer which
16 is described in section 7436 and which com-
17 mences after the date which is 1 year after the
18 date of the enactment of this section, that a
19 class of individuals holding positions with such
20 taxpayer which are substantially similar to the
21 position held by such individual are employees.

22 “(C) FIRST APPLICABLE FINAL REGULA-
23 TION.—The term ‘first applicable final regula-
24 tion’ means, with respect to any individual, the
25 first final regulation (or other guidance of gen-

1 eral applicability) which sets forth the factors
2 for determining the employment status of a
3 class of individuals holding positions substan-
4 tially similar to the position held by such indi-
5 vidual.

6 “(2) EMPLOYMENT STATUS.—The term ‘em-
7 ployment status’ means the status of an individual,
8 under the usual common law rules applicable in de-
9 termining the employer-employee relationship, as an
10 employee or as an independent contractor (or other
11 individual who is not an employee).

12 “(d) CONTINUATION OF CERTAIN SPECIAL RULES.—

13 “(1) EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN SKILLED WORK-
14 ERS.—Subsection (b) shall not apply in the case of
15 an individual who, pursuant to an arrangement be-
16 tween the taxpayer and another person, provides
17 services for such other person as an engineer, de-
18 signer, drafter, computer programmer, systems ana-
19 lyst, or other similarly skilled worker engaged in a
20 similar line of work.

21 “(2) NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY OF SECTION.—

22 An officer or employee of the Internal Revenue Serv-
23 ice shall, before or at the commencement of any
24 audit inquiry relating to the employment status of
25 one or more individuals who perform services for the

1 taxpayer, provide the taxpayer with a written notice
2 of the provisions of this section.

3 “(3) RULES RELATING TO STATUTORY STAND-
4 ARDS.—For purposes of subsection (b)(2)—

5 “(A) a taxpayer may not rely on an audit
6 commenced after December 31, 1996, for pur-
7 poses of subparagraph (B) thereof unless such
8 audit included an examination for purposes of
9 any tax imposed by this subtitle whether the in-
10 dividual involved (or any individual holding a
11 position substantially similar to the position
12 held by the individual involved) should be treat-
13 ed as an employee of the taxpayer,

14 “(B) in no event shall the significant seg-
15 ment requirement of subparagraph (C) thereof
16 be construed to require a reasonable showing of
17 the practice of more than 25 percent of the in-
18 dustry (determined by not taking into account
19 the taxpayer), and

20 “(C) in applying the long-standing recog-
21 nized practice requirement of subparagraph (C)
22 thereof—

23 “(i) such requirement shall not be
24 construed as requiring the practice to have
25 continued for more than 10 years, and

1 “(ii) a practice shall not fail to be
2 treated as long-standing merely because
3 such practice began after 1978.

4 “(4) AVAILABILITY OF SAFE HARBORS.—Noth-
5 ing in this section shall be construed to provide that
6 subsection (b) only applies where the individual in-
7 volved is otherwise an employee of the taxpayer.

8 “(5) BURDEN OF PROOF.—

9 “(A) IN GENERAL.—If—

10 “(i) a taxpayer establishes a prima
11 facie case that it was reasonable not to
12 treat an individual as an employee for pur-
13 poses of subsection (b), and

14 “(ii) the taxpayer has fully cooperated
15 with reasonable requests from the Sec-
16 retary,

17 then the burden of proof with respect to such
18 treatment shall be on the Secretary.

19 “(B) EXCEPTION FOR OTHER REASONABLE
20 BASIS.—In the case of any issue involving
21 whether the taxpayer had a reasonable basis
22 not to treat an individual as an employee for
23 purposes of subsection (b), subparagraph (A)
24 shall only apply for purposes of determining
25 whether the taxpayer meets the requirements of

1 subparagraph (A), (B), or (C) of subsection
2 (b)(2).

3 “(6) PRESERVATION OF PRIOR PERIOD SAFE
4 HARBOR.—If—

5 “(A) an individual would (but for the
6 treatment referred to in subparagraph (B)) be
7 deemed not to be an employee of the taxpayer
8 under subsection (b) for any prior period, and

9 “(B) such individual is treated by the tax-
10 payer as an employee for purposes of the taxes
11 imposed by this subtitle for any subsequent pe-
12 riod,

13 then, for purposes of applying such taxes for such
14 prior period with respect to the taxpayer, the indi-
15 vidual shall be deemed not to be an employee.

16 “(7) SUBSTANTIALLY SIMILAR POSITION.—For
17 purposes of subsection (b) and this subsection, the
18 determination as to whether an individual holds a
19 position substantially similar to a position held by
20 another individual shall include consideration of the
21 relationship between the taxpayer and such individ-
22 uals.

23 “(8) TREATMENT OF TEST ROOM SUPERVISORS
24 AND PROCTORS WHO ASSIST IN THE ADMINISTRA-

1 TION OF COLLEGE ENTRANCE AND PLACEMENT
2 EXAMS.—

3 “(A) IN GENERAL.—In the case of an indi-
4 vidual described in subparagraph (B) who is
5 providing services as a test proctor or room su-
6 pervisor by assisting in the administration of
7 college entrance or placement examinations,
8 subsection (b) shall be applied to such services
9 performed after December 31, 2006 (and remu-
10 neration paid for such services) without regard
11 to paragraph (3) thereof.

12 “(B) APPLICABILITY.—An individual is de-
13 scribed in this subparagraph if the individual—

14 “(i) is providing the services described
15 in subsection (b) to an organization de-
16 scribed in section 501(c) and exempt from
17 tax under section 501(a), and

18 “(ii) is not otherwise treated as an
19 employee of such organization for purposes
20 of this subtitle.

21 “(9) TREATMENT OF SECURITIES BROKER
22 DEALERS.—In determining for purposes of this title
23 whether a registered representative of a securities
24 broker-dealer is an employee (as defined in section
25 3121(d)), no weight shall be given to instructions

1 from the service recipient which are imposed only in
2 compliance with investor protection standards im-
3 posed by the Federal Government, any State govern-
4 ment, or a governing body pursuant to a delegation
5 by a Federal or State agency.

6 “(e) STATEMENTS TO INDEPENDENT CONTRAC-
7 TORS.—

8 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Each person who contracts
9 for the services of an independent contractor on a
10 regular and ongoing basis, within the scope of such
11 person’s trade or business, shall provide a written
12 statement to such independent contractor notifying
13 such independent contractor of the Federal tax obli-
14 gations of an independent contractor, the labor and
15 employment law protections that do not apply to
16 independent contractors, and the right of such inde-
17 pendent contractor to seek a status determination
18 from the Internal Revenue Service.

19 “(2) INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR.—For pur-
20 poses of this subsection, the term ‘independent con-
21 tractor’ means any individual who is not treated as
22 an employee by the person receiving the services re-
23 ferred to in paragraph (1).

24 “(3) TIMING OF STATEMENT.—Except as other-
25 wise provided by the Secretary, the statement re-

1 quired under paragraph (1) shall be provided within
2 a reasonable period of entering into the contract re-
3 ferred to in paragraph (1).

4 “(4) DEVELOPMENT OF MODEL STATEMENT.—
5 The Secretary shall develop model materials for pro-
6 viding the statement required under paragraph
7 (1).”.

8 (b) REDUCED PENALTY NOT APPLICABLE IN CASES
9 OF NONCOMPLIANCE WITH GUIDANCE WITHOUT REA-
10 SONABLE BASIS.—Subsection (c) of section 3509 of the
11 Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended—

12 (1) by striking “if such liability” and inserting
13 “if—

14 “(1) such liability”, and

15 (2) by striking the period at the end and insert-
16 ing “, or

17 “(2) such liability relates to an individual who
18 is treated as an employee under regulations or other
19 guidance issued by the Secretary under section
20 3511(a) and the taxpayer lacks a reasonable basis
21 for treating the individual as other than an em-
22 ployee.

23 In the case of a taxpayer which has received a final written
24 determination from the Internal Revenue Service holding
25 that the individual referred to in paragraph (2) (or an-

1 other individual who holds a position with the taxpayer
2 substantially similar to the position held by such indi-
3 vidual) is an employee, such taxpayer shall be treated for
4 purposes of paragraph (2) as lacking a reasonable basis
5 for treating such individual as other than an employee
6 with respect to periods beginning on and after the first
7 day of the first calendar quarter beginning more than 180
8 days after the date of such written determination unless
9 the taxpayer establishes by clear and convincing evidence
10 that the taxpayer has a reasonable basis for such treat-
11 ment.”.

12 (c) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

13 (1) Paragraph (2) of section 6724(d) of the In-
14 ternal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended by striking
15 “or” at the end of subparagraph (GG), by striking
16 the period at the end of subparagraph (HH) and in-
17 serting “, or”, and by inserting after subparagraph
18 (HH) the following new subparagraph:

19 “(II) section 3511(e) (relating to state-
20 ments to independent contractors).”.

21 (2) Paragraph (2) of section 7436(a) of such
22 Code is amended by striking “subsection (a) of sec-
23 tion 530 of the Revenue Act of 1978” and inserting
24 “section 3511(b)”.

1 (3) The table of sections for chapter 25 of such
2 Code is amended by adding at the end the following
3 new item:

“Sec. 3511. Authority to issue guidance clarifying employment status.”.

4 (d) TERMINATION OF SECTION 530 OF THE REV-
5 ENUE ACT OF 1978.—The Revenue Act of 1978 is amend-
6 ed by striking section 530.

7 (e) REPORTS ON WORKER MISCLASSIFICATION.—Be-
8 ginning with the first fiscal year beginning after the date
9 the first regulation or other guidance is issued for public
10 comment under section 3511(a) of the Internal Revenue
11 Code of 1986 (as added by this section):

12 (1) A report each fiscal year on worker classi-
13 fication which shall include the total number of ex-
14 aminations of employers initiated because of sus-
15 pected worker classification issues, the total number
16 of examinations that included determinations on
17 worker classification issues, the amount of additional
18 tax liabilities associated with worker classification
19 enforcement actions, the number of workers reclassi-
20 fied as a result of these actions, the number of re-
21 quests for Determination of Worker Status (Form
22 SS-8), and technical guidance on how to understand
23 the data provided in the report.

24 (2) A report each fiscal year in which new sta-
25 tistically valid data is compiled and interpreted on

1 worker classification, prepared on the basis of infor-
2 mation gathered during an Employment Tax Study
3 conducted by the National Research Program (NRP)
4 of the Internal Revenue Service. Such report shall
5 provide statistical estimates of the number of em-
6 ployers misclassifying workers, the number of work-
7 ers misclassified, the industries involved, data inter-
8 pretations and conclusions, and a description of the
9 impact of improper worker classification on the em-
10 ployment tax gap.

11 (f) EFFECTIVE DATES.—

12 (1) DELAYED EFFECTIVE DATE OF REGULA-
13 TIONS AND GUIDANCE.—Except as provided in para-
14 graph (2), any regulation or other guidance issued
15 under section 3511(a) of the Internal Revenue Code
16 of 1986, as added by this section, shall not apply to
17 services rendered before the date which is 1 year
18 after the date of the enactment of this Act.

19 (2) TREATMENT OF SECURITIES BROKER DEAL-
20 ERS.—Paragraph (9) of section 3511(d) of the In-
21 ternal Revenue Code of 1986, as added by this sec-
22 tion, shall apply to services performed after Decem-
23 ber 31, 1997.

24 (3) AUTHORITY TO ISSUE REGULATIONS AND
25 GUIDANCE IMMEDIATELY.—So much of the amend-

1 ment made by subsection (d) as relates to subsection
2 (b) of section 530 of the Revenue Act of 1978 shall
3 take effect on the date of the enactment of this Act.

4 (4) DELAYED TERMINATION OF REMAINDER OF
5 SECTION 530 OF THE REVENUE ACT OF 1978.—Ex-
6 cept as provided in paragraph (3), the amendments
7 made by subsections (c)(1) and (d) shall apply to
8 services rendered on or after the date which is 1
9 year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

○