

Free help first, then a scam check

Start with the programs that cost nothing. Post this on a library or church bulletin board.

No-cost options

- **VITA / TCE:** free return preparation for households generally earning about \$70,000 or less, people with disabilities, limited-English speakers and (TCE) people 60+. In Tyler, Goodwill Industries of East Texas runs VITA sites during filing season. Find current sites with the IRS VITA locator or by calling 800-906-9887.
- **Taxpayer Advocate Service:** an independent office inside the IRS for cases causing financial harm or stuck in the system. Start with Form 911.
- **Low Income Taxpayer Clinics:** free or low-cost representation in audits, appeals and collection. IRS Publication 4134 lists the Texas clinics, including Lone Star Legal Aid, which has a Tyler office.
- **Area Agency on Aging of East Texas:** benefits counseling for older adults.
- **2-1-1 Texas:** dial 211 for local assistance programs.

Five-point scam check

1. Asked to pay with a gift card, crypto or wire? Stop. The IRS never does.
2. Told a settlement amount before anyone has seen your finances? Walk away.
3. Large fee demanded before anyone has pulled your IRS transcripts? Ask why.
4. Told to stop talking to the IRS with no power of attorney filed? Red flag.
5. Threatened with arrest by phone? Hang up and call the IRS yourself.

Report deceptive tax-relief advertising to the Texas Attorney General's consumer protection division.