



**United States Department of Justice
Executive Office for United States Trustees**

Public Report:

**Debtor Audits by the
United States Trustee Program
Fiscal Year 2020**

*(As required by Section 603(a)(2)(D) of the Bankruptcy Abuse
Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-8)*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States Trustee Program (USTP) is authorized to audit individual chapter 7 and chapter 13 bankruptcy cases under the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-8, 119 Stat. 23 (2005) (BAPCPA). Section 603(a)(2)(D) of the BAPCPA states that the Attorney General must:^{1/}

(D) Establish procedures for providing, not less frequently than annually, public information concerning the aggregate results of such audits including the percentage of cases, by district, in which a material misstatement of income or expenditures is reported.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, the USTP designated 1,396 cases for audit. Of the cases designated for audit, 54 were dismissed before the case was assigned to an audit firm. Of the remaining 1,342 cases, 995 were random audits and 347 were exception audits (audits of cases with income or expenditures above a statistical norm). Reports of Audit were filed in 793 of the completed audits, and at least one material misstatement was reported in 16 percent of these cases. There were 49 Reports of No Audit filed. A Report of No Audit is filed when a case selected for audit is closed without completion either because the debtor failed to provide sufficient information to complete the audit or the case was dismissed while the audit was in process. Audit selections were suspended starting in March 2020 due to public health considerations associated with COVID-19. In addition, 500 audits that were already in process at that time were suspended and ultimately terminated with no report filed.

INTRODUCTION

The United States Trustee Program is the component of the Department of Justice whose mission is to promote the integrity and efficiency of the bankruptcy system for the benefit of all stakeholders—debtors, creditors, and the public. The USTP consists of 21 regions with 90 field offices nationwide and an Executive Office in Washington, DC. Each field office is responsible

^{1/} Authority to implement provisions of the BAPCPA was delegated from the Attorney General to the Director of the Executive Office for United States Trustees (Attorney General Order No. 2785-2005 dated October 14, 2005).

for carrying out numerous administrative, regulatory, and litigation/enforcement responsibilities under title 11 (the Bankruptcy Code) and title 28 of the United States Code.^{2/}

The USTP is authorized to contract with independent firms to perform audits of individual chapter 7 and chapter 13 cases designated by the USTP. The purpose of the audit is to determine the accuracy, veracity, and completeness of petitions, schedules, and other information required to be provided by the debtor under sections 521 and 1322 of title 11. The audits are designed to provide baseline data to gauge the magnitude of fraud, abuse, and error in the bankruptcy system; to assist the USTP in identifying cases of fraud, abuse, and error; and to enhance deterrence.

The USTP selects independent audit firms through a competitive procurement process to perform the audits using certified public accountants or independent licensed public accountants.^{3/} The debtor audits are conducted in accordance with audit standards promulgated by the USTP and published in the *Federal Register*.^{4/}

The USTP is authorized to randomly designate for audit one out of every 250 consumer bankruptcy cases per federal judicial district and to designate cases for exception audit in which the income or expenditures of a debtor deviate from the statistical norm of the district where the case was filed. Prior to the suspension of audits in March 2020, the USTP was designating cases for random audit at the authorized rate.

I. CASE DESIGNATION PROCESS AND TERMINOLOGY

Random audits are selected randomly from all consumer bankruptcy cases within a federal judicial district. In contrast, cases designated for exception audit must meet specific criteria established by the USTP. These criteria are based on income or expenditures greater than a

^{2/} The USTP has jurisdiction in all federal judicial districts except those in Alabama and North Carolina.

^{3/} BAPCPA Section 603(a)(2).

^{4/} BAPCPA Section 603(a)(1); *Federal Register*, Vol. 71, No. 190 (October 2, 2006).

statistical norm for the district where the case was filed, as specified under uncodified section 603(a)(2)(C) of the BAPCPA.

An audit consists of a comparison between selected items on a debtor's originally filed bankruptcy papers and documents produced by the debtor at the request of the audit firm. Audit firms also conduct at least two searches using commercially and publicly available database services to look for unreported assets and to verify the market value of assets.

After an audit has been completed, the audit firm files a Report of Audit with the court and transmits a copy to the United States Trustee. The Report of Audit identifies any material misstatement that is reported by the audit firm. The report is not a legal determination and the legal effect of the audit firm's finding of a material misstatement, if any, is a question for the court. Prior to filing a Report of Audit with the court noting a material misstatement, the audit firm contacts the debtor, through counsel if represented, to provide the debtor an opportunity to offer an explanation or supply additional information that may negate the finding. A material misstatement indicates the audit produced information that challenged the accuracy, veracity, or completeness of a debtor's petition, schedules, or other filed bankruptcy documentation. Inaccurate or incomplete information deprives the court, the United States Trustee, the private trustee, and creditors of adequate information to decide whether to conduct further investigation, recover assets, or seek relief against the debtor.

While specific criteria for reporting a material misstatement are not released to the public to preserve the integrity of the audit process, material misstatements in general relate to the understatement or omission of the debtor's assets, income, or a pre-petition transfer of property. If a material misstatement is identified in a Report of Audit, the bankruptcy court gives notice to all creditors in the case. In addition, the United States Trustee determines what action is appropriate based on the material misstatement(s) and may pursue a variety of actions depending on the circumstances of the case, including seeking denial or revocation of discharge, or reporting the material misstatement to the United States Attorney.^{5/} In many instances, the United States Trustee may take no action on a material misstatement identified in a Report of Audit based on a

^{5/} See 11 U.S.C. §§ 707, 727(a), 727(d)(4)(A); 28 U.S.C. § 586(f)(2)(B).

number of factors, including whether the debtor corrected the error (e.g., filed amended schedules) or whether the material misstatement was intentional.

If the audit firm cannot complete the audit because the debtor did not produce documents requested in connection with the audit or because the case was dismissed while the audit was in process, the audit firm files a Report of No Audit with the court and transmits a copy to the United States Trustee. The United States Trustee may take appropriate enforcement action when a Report of No Audit is filed, including seeking revocation of discharge, if the debtor fails to satisfactorily explain the failure to make available the documentation requested for the audit.^{6/}

In one chapter 7 case in which a Report of Audit identified a material misstatement, the United States Trustee sought conversion and the debtor agreed to convert his case to chapter 13, thereby preventing the chapter 7 discharge of \$136,264 in unsecured debt. The audit revealed that the debtor, a former professional athlete, had under-reported his monthly income by more than \$2,000. However, a follow-up investigation by the United States Trustee showed that the debtor actually had nearly \$3,700 in monthly disposable income, which was sufficient to repay unsecured creditors in full.

II. OUTCOMES

Outcomes are presented in this report both as aggregate national numbers from all judicial districts within the jurisdiction of the USTP, as well as separately by judicial district.

Aggregate Audit Outcomes

Table 1 shows the total number of cases designated for audit, broken down between cases with no report (i.e., cases that were dismissed prior to assignment to an audit firm) and cases where either a Report of Audit or a Report of No Audit was filed with the court. For Reports of Audit filed with the court, the table also identifies the number of cases with at least one material misstatement and the number of cases with no material misstatements. Further, for all cases designated for audit, the table shows the distribution between random audits and exception audits.

^{6/} See 11 U.S.C. § 727(d)(4)(B).

In FY 2020, the USTP designated 1,396 cases for audit. Of the cases designated for audit, 54 were dismissed before the case was assigned to an audit firm. Of the remaining 1,342 cases, 995 were random audits and 347 were exception audits. Reports of Audit were filed in 793 of the completed audits, and at least one material misstatement was reported in 16 percent of these cases. Twenty-two percent of exception audits identified at least one material misstatement, compared to 14 percent of random audits. There were 49 Reports of No Audit.

	Total	Random	Exception	% of Cases Designated*
Cases Designated for Audit	1,396	1,049	347	
Cases Suspended Due to Pandemic	500	357	143	
Cases with No Report	54	54	0	6%
Cases with Report	842	638	204	94%
Report of Audit Filed	793	596	197	89%
No Material Misstatements	666	512	154	
% of Reports of Audit	84%	86%	78%	
At Least One Material Misstatement	127	84	43	
% of Reports of Audit	16%	14%	22%	
Report of No Audit Filed	49	42	7	5%

** Percentages exclude cases suspended due to the pandemic and are rounded.*

More than one material misstatement may be reported in a single case. For FY 2020, income-related material misstatements were reported in nearly 75 percent of the cases with material misstatements, and more than 35 percent of the cases with material misstatements had asset-related or transfer-related material misstatements.

Outcomes by Judicial District

Table 2 shows the distribution of cases by judicial district in which either a Report of Audit or a Report of No Audit was filed. For cases with a Report of Audit, a breakdown of the number and percentage of cases with at least one material misstatement is provided. This table combines information from both random and exception audits. Due to differences in the number of case filings per judicial district, there is wide variation among districts in the number of Reports of Audit; districts with fewer filings will have fewer reports. For districts with 10 or more Reports of Audit, the percentage of audits with material misstatements ranged from zero percent to 45 percent.

District	Reports of No Audit	Reports of Audit	At Least One Material Misstatement	
			# of Cases	% of Reports of Audit
Alaska	0	1	0	0%
Arizona	2	12	0	0%
Arkansas Eastern	0	3	1	33%
Arkansas Western	0	6	0	0%
California Central	4	53	13	25%
California Eastern	1	20	3	15%
California Northern	0	7	2	29%
California Southern	0	9	0	0%
Colorado	1	7	2	29%
Connecticut	0	9	0	0%
District of Columbia	0	1	0	0%
Delaware	0	5	0	0%
Florida Middle	2	42	3	7%
Florida Northern	1	4	1	25%
Florida Southern	0	19	0	0%
Georgia Middle	0	5	0	0%
Georgia Northern	6	26	3	12%
Georgia Southern	0	3	0	0%
Guam	0	0	0	N/A
Hawaii	1	0	0	N/A

Table 2 (continued): Outcomes by Judicial District for FY 2020

District	Reports of No Audit	Reports of Audit	At Least One Material Misstatement	
			# of Cases	% of Reports of Audit
Idaho	0	3	0	0%
Illinois Central	0	8	2	25%
Illinois Northern	2	45	6	13%
Illinois Southern	0	2	0	0%
Indiana Northern	1	7	1	14%
Indiana Southern	1	13	1	8%
Iowa Northern	0	4	1	25%
Iowa Southern	0	3	2	67%
Kansas	0	11	5	45%
Kentucky Eastern	0	9	1	11%
Kentucky Western	0	7	0	0%
Louisiana Eastern	0	1	0	0%
Louisiana Middle	0	3	0	0%
Louisiana Western	1	7	1	14%
Maine	0	4	1	25%
Maryland	1	23	4	17%
Massachusetts	0	6	2	33%
Michigan Eastern	3	25	6	24%
Michigan Western	0	7	1	14%
Minnesota	0	9	3	33%
Mississippi Northern	0	6	0	0%
Mississippi Southern	0	10	1	10%
Missouri Eastern	0	19	4	21%
Missouri Western	0	8	1	13%
Montana	0	1	1	100%
Nebraska	0	4	1	25%
Nevada	1	11	0	0%
New Hampshire	0	2	1	50%
New Jersey	1	28	6	21%
New Mexico	0	3	1	33%
New York Eastern	2	15	2	13%
New York Northern	1	9	0	0%
New York Southern	1	6	0	0%
New York Western	0	6	0	0%
North Dakota	0	2	1	50%

Table 2 (continued): Outcomes by Judicial District for FY 2020

District	Reports of No Audit	Reports of Audit	At Least One Material Misstatement	
			# of Cases	% of Reports of Audit
Northern Mariana Islands	0	0	0	N/A
Ohio Northern	1	22	3	14%
Ohio Southern	2	16	3	19%
Oklahoma Eastern	0	4	1	25%
Oklahoma Northern	0	1	0	0%
Oklahoma Western	0	4	1	25%
Oregon	2	14	3	21%
Pennsylvania Eastern	0	7	2	29%
Pennsylvania Middle	1	9	2	22%
Pennsylvania Western	1	7	0	0%
Puerto Rico	0	0	0	N/A
Rhode Island	0	0	0	N/A
South Carolina	0	7	2	29%
South Dakota	0	1	0	0%
Tennessee Eastern	0	11	3	27%
Tennessee Middle	1	9	1	11%
Tennessee Western	2	12	4	33%
Texas Eastern	0	3	1	33%
Texas Northern	3	11	1	9%
Texas Southern	0	9	0	0%
Texas Western	1	11	0	0%
Utah	1	11	2	18%
Vermont	0	0	0	N/A
Virgin Islands	0	0	0	N/A
Virginia Eastern	1	26	5	19%
Virginia Western	0	10	2	20%
Washington Eastern	0	1	0	0%
Washington Western	0	10	2	20%
West Virginia Northern	0	2	2	100%
West Virginia Southern	0	1	0	0%
Wisconsin Eastern	0	8	1	13%
Wisconsin Western	0	5	1	20%
Wyoming	0	2	1	50%
TOTAL	49	793	127	16%

CONCLUSION

In FY 2020, the United States Trustee Program continued to administer audits of individual chapter 7 and chapter 13 bankruptcy cases. Out of 793 Reports of Audit, a material misstatement was reported in 14 percent of the random audits and 22 percent of the exception audits. This resulted in an overall material misstatement rate of 16 percent.