



Kalamazoo County District Court targets tax refunds: 'Interceptions' planned for about 2,000 who owe money

By Gabrielle Russon | Kalamazoo Gazette

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KALAMAZOO — Could those hundreds of dollars in unpaid traffic tickets cause you to lose out on your state income tax refund?

With the tax filing deadline set for today, Kalamazoo County District Court is expecting to intercept about 2,000 tax refunds this year, officials said this week.

The interceptions are estimated to net about \$170,000, which will go back into the county's general fund, Chief District Judge Richard A. Santoni said.

"It's all about getting money back into the tax coffers," Santoni said.

Court officials give information to the state treasury department to find people who owe the court money. They might have skipped paying restitution, traffic tickets or others fines from district court-related matters.

The state sends notices to those people, telling them their refunds have been intercepted. People who want to fight it can ask for a hearing.

Tax interceptions aren't new.

Tax refunds have been taken from people who failed to pay child support. Retailers that are owed money can also go to court and get an order for a tax interception, said Terry Stanton, public information officer with the Michigan Department of Treasury.

But more counties are starting to use tax interceptions as a way to collect fines from people who are unwilling to pay, Santoni said.

"We've slowly but surely increased the number of interceptions," he said. "You get a little better at it every year."

The district court decided to take advantage of the opportunity and intercept tax returns starting in the 2006 tax year.

During the 2008 tax season, the district court intercepted about 1,200 state tax refunds.

So far this year, Santoni said there have only been a few objections in Kalamazoo County.

"If somebody thinks they owe us money ... come see us," Santoni said. "You can fill out a petition for an installment plan or fill out a petition for community service.

"Unfortunately, when we don't hear from people, we have to resort to these other methods" to collect money, Santoni added.

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