

(b) Subject to the provisions of paragraphs (c) and (d) of this section, the amount of garnishment will be the lesser of—

(1) The amount indicated on the garnishment order up to 15% of the debtor's disposable pay; or

(2) The amount set forth in 15 U.S.C. 1673(a)(2) (Restriction on Garnishment), which is the amount by which a debtor's disposable pay exceeds an amount equivalent to thirty times the minimum wage. *See* 29 CFR 870.10.

(c) When a debtor's pay is subject to withholding orders with priority, the following will apply:

(1) Unless otherwise provided by Federal law, withholding orders issued under this part will be paid in the amounts set forth under paragraph (b) of this section and will have priority over other withholding orders which are served later in time. Notwithstanding the foregoing, withholding orders for family support will have priority over withholding orders issued under this part.

(2) If amounts are being withheld from a debtor's pay pursuant to a withholding order served on an employer before a withholding order issued pursuant to this part, or if a withholding order for family support is served on an employer at any time, the amounts withheld pursuant to the withholding order issued under this part will be the lesser of—

(i) The amount calculated under paragraph (b) of this section, or

(ii) An amount equal to 25% of the debtor's disposable pay less the amount(s) withheld under the withholding order(s) with priority.

(3) If a debtor owes more than one debt to GSA, the Agency may issue multiple withholding orders provided the total amount garnished from the debtor's pay for such orders does not exceed the amount set forth in paragraph (b) of this section.

(d) An amount greater than that set forth in paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section may be withheld upon the written consent of the debtor.

(e) The employer shall promptly pay to GSA all amounts withheld in accordance with the withholding order issued pursuant to this part.

(f) An employer will not be required to vary its normal pay and disbursement cycles in order to comply with the withholding order.

(g) Any assignment or allotment by an employee of his or her earnings will be void to the extent it interferes with or

prohibits execution of the withholding order issued under this part, except for any assignment or allotment made pursuant to a family support judgment or order.

(h) The employer will withhold the appropriate amount from the debtor's wages for each pay period until the employer receives notification from GSA to discontinue wage withholding. The garnishment order will indicate a reasonable period of time within which the employer is required to commence wage withholding, usually the first payday after the employer receives the order. However, if the first payday is within ten (10) days after the receipt of the garnishment order, the employer may begin deductions on the second payday.

(i) Payments received through a wage garnishment order will be applied in the following order:

(1) To outstanding penalties.

(2) To administrative costs incurred by GSA to collect the debt.

(3) To interest accrued on the debt at the rate established by the terms of the obligation under which it arose or by applicable law.

(4) To outstanding principal.

#### **§ 105–57.009 Exclusions from garnishment.**

GSA will not garnish the wages of a debtor who it knows has been involuntarily separated from employment until the debtor has been reemployed continuously for at least 12 months. The debtor has the burden of informing GSA of the circumstances surrounding an involuntary separation from employment.

#### **§ 105–57.010 Financial hardship.**

(a) A debtor whose wages are subject to a wage withholding order under this part, may, at any time, request a review by GSA of the amount garnished, based on materially changed circumstances such as disability, divorce, or catastrophic illness which result in financial hardship.

(b) A debtor requesting a review under paragraph (a) of this section shall submit the basis for claiming the current amount of garnishment results in a financial hardship to the debtor, along with supporting documentation.

(c) If a financial hardship is found, GSA will downwardly adjust, by an amount and for a period of time agreeable to the Agency, the amount garnished to reflect the debtor's financial condition. GSA will notify the

employer of any adjustments to the amounts to be withheld.

#### **§ 105–57.011 Ending garnishment.**

(a) Once GSA has fully recovered the amounts owed by the debtor, including interest, penalties, and administrative costs consistent with the FCCS, the Agency will send the debtor's employer notification to discontinue wage withholding.

(b) At least annually, GSA will review its debtors' accounts to ensure that garnishment has been terminated for accounts that have been paid in full.

#### **§ 105–57.012 Actions prohibited by the employer.**

An employer may not discharge, refuse to employ, or take disciplinary action against the debtor due to the issuance of a withholding order under this part. *See* 31 U.S.C. 3720D(e).

#### **§ 105–57.013 Refunds.**

(a) If a hearing official, at a hearing held pursuant to § 105–57.005 of this part, determines that a debt is not legally due and owing to the United States, GSA will promptly refund any amount collected by means of administrative wage garnishment.

(b) Unless required by Federal law or contract, refunds under this part will not bear interest.

#### **§ 105–57.014 Right of action.**

GSA may sue any employer for any amount that the employer fails to withhold from wages owed and payable to an employee in accordance with §§ 105–57.006 and 105–57.008 of this part, plus attorney's fees, costs, and if applicable, punitive damages. However, a suit may not be filed before the termination of the collection action involving a particular debtor, unless earlier filing is necessary to avoid expiration of any applicable statute of limitations period. For purposes of this part, "termination of the collection action" occurs when GSA has terminated collection action in accordance with the FCCS or other applicable standards. In any event, termination of the collection action will have been deemed to occur if GSA has not received any payments to satisfy the debt from the particular debtor whose wages were subject to garnishment, in whole or in part, for a period of one (1) year.

[FR Doc. 03–17400 Filed 7–10–03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6820–34–P