



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

38 CFR Parts 36 and 42

RIN 2900-AR08

Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Amendments

AGENCY: Department of Veterans Affairs.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is providing public notice of inflationary adjustments to the maximum civil monetary penalties assessed or enforced by VA, as implemented by the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015, for calendar year 2021. VA may impose civil monetary penalties for false loan guaranty certifications. Also, VA may impose civil monetary penalties for fraudulent claims or written statements made in connection with VA programs generally. The Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990, as amended by the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015, sets forth a formula that increases the maximum statutory amounts for civil monetary penalties and directs VA to give public notice of the new maximum amounts by regulation.

DATES: This rule is effective [INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*].

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Stephanie Li, Chief, Regulations Team, Loan Guaranty Service, Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20420, (202) 632-8862. (This is not a toll-free number.)

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On November 2, 2015, the President signed into law the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015 (2015 Act) (Pub. L. 114-74, sec. 701, 129 Stat. 599), which amended the Federal Civil

Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990 (Pub. L. 101-410, 104 Stat. 890), to improve the effectiveness of civil monetary penalties and to maintain their deterrent effect. The 2015 Act was codified in a note following 28 U.S.C. 2461. The 2015 Act requires agencies to publish annual adjustments for inflation, based on the percent change between the Consumer Price Index (defined in the Act as the Consumer Price Index for all-urban consumers (CPI-U) published by the Department of Labor) for the month of October preceding the date of the adjustment and the prior year's October CPI-U. 28 U.S.C. 2461 note, secs. 4(a) and (b) and 5(b)(1). This rule implements the 2021 calendar year inflation adjustment amounts.

Under 38 U.S.C. 3710(g)(4)(B), VA is authorized to levy civil monetary penalties against private lenders that originate VA-guaranteed loans if a lender falsely certifies that they have complied with certain credit information and loan processing standards, as set forth by chapter 37, title 38 U.S.C. and part 36, title 38 CFR. Under section 3710(g)(4)(B), any lender who knowingly and willfully makes such a false certification shall be liable to the United States Government for a civil penalty equal to two times the amount of the Secretary's loss on the loan involved or to another appropriate amount, not to exceed \$10,000, whichever is greater. VA implemented the penalty amount in 38 CFR 36.4340(k)(1)(i) and (k)(3). On December 23, 2020, OMB issued Circular M-21-10. This circular reflects that the October 2019 CPI-U was 257.346 and the October 2020 CPI-U was 260.388, resulting in an inflation adjustment multiplier of 1.01182. Accordingly, the calendar year 2021 inflation revision imposes an adjustment from \$23,331 to \$23,607.

Under 31 U.S.C. 3802, VA can impose monetary penalties against any person who makes, presents, or submits a claim or written statement to VA that the person knows or has reason to know is false, fictitious, or fraudulent, or who engages in other covered conduct. The statute permits, in addition to any other remedy that may be

prescribed by law, a civil penalty of not more than \$5,000 for each claim. 31 U.S.C. 3802(a)(1) and (2). VA implemented the penalty amount in 38 CFR 42.3(a)(1) and (b)(1). As previously noted, Circular M-21-10 reflects an inflation adjustment multiplier of 1.01182. Therefore, the calendar year 2021 inflation revision imposes an adjustment from \$11,665 to \$11,803.

Accordingly, VA is revising 38 CFR 36.4340(k)(1)(i) and (3) and 38 CFR 42.3(a)(1) and (b)(1) to reflect the 2021 inflationary adjustments for civil monetary penalties assessed or enforced by VA.

Administrative Procedure Act

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs finds that there is good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) and (d)(3) to dispense with the opportunity for prior notice and public comment and to publish this rule with an immediate effective date. The 2015 Act requires agencies to make annual adjustments for inflation to the allowed amounts of civil monetary penalties “notwithstanding section 553 of title 5, United States Code.” 28 U.S.C. 2461 note, sec. 4(a) and (b). The penalty adjustments, and the methodology used to determine the adjustments, are set by the terms of the 2015 Act. VA has no discretion to make changes in those areas. Therefore, an opportunity for prior notice and public comment and a delayed effective date is unnecessary.

Executive Orders 12866 and 13563

Executive Orders 12866 and 13563 direct agencies to assess the costs and benefits of available regulatory alternatives and, when regulation is necessary, to select regulatory approaches that maximize net benefits (including potential economic, environmental, public health and safety effects, and other advantages; distributive impacts; and equity). Executive Order 13563 (Improving Regulation and Regulatory Review) emphasizes the importance of quantifying both costs and benefits, reducing costs, harmonizing rules, and promoting flexibility. The Office of

Information and Regulatory Affairs has determined that this rule is not a significant regulatory action under Executive Order 12866. VA's impact analysis can be found as a supporting document at <http://www.regulations.gov>, usually within 48 hours after the rulemaking document is published. Additionally, a copy of the rulemaking and its impact analysis are available on VA's website at <http://www.va.gov/orpm/>, by following the link for "VA Regulations Published From FY 2004 Through Fiscal Year to Date."

Unfunded Mandates

The Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 requires, at 2 U.S.C. 1532, that agencies prepare an assessment of anticipated costs and benefits before issuing any rule that may result in the expenditure by State, local, and tribal governments, in the aggregate, or by the private sector, of \$100 million or more (adjusted annually for inflation) in any one year. This final rule will have no such effect on State, local, and Tribal governments, or on the private sector.

Paperwork Reduction Act

This final rule contains no provisions constituting a collection of information under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. 3501-3521).

Regulatory Flexibility Act

The Regulatory Flexibility Act, 5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.* (RFA), imposes certain requirements on Federal agency rules that are subject to the notice and comment requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), 5 U.S.C. 553(b). This final rule is exempt from the notice and comment requirements of the APA because the 2015 Act directed the Department to issue the annual adjustments without regard to section 553 of the APA. Therefore, the requirements of the RFA applicable to notice and comment rulemaking do not apply to this rule. Accordingly, the Department is not

required either to certify that the final rule would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities or to conduct a regulatory flexibility analysis.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance number and title for the program affected by this document is 64.114, Veterans Housing Guaranteed and Insured Loans.

Congressional Review Act

Pursuant to the Congressional Review Act (5 U.S.C. 801 *et seq.*), the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs designated this rule as not a major rule, as defined by 5 U.S.C. 804(2).

List of Subjects

38 CFR Part 36

Condominiums, Housing, Individuals with disabilities, Loan programs-housing and community development, Loan programs-veterans, Manufactured homes, Mortgage insurance, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Veterans.

38 CFR Part 42

Administrative practice and procedure, Claims, Fraud, Penalties.

Signing Authority

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, or designee, approved this document and authorized the undersigned to sign and submit the document to the Office of the Federal Register for publication electronically as an official document of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Brooks D. Tucker, Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs, Performing the Delegable Duties of the Chief of Staff, Department of Veterans Affairs, approved this document on January 14, 2021, for publication.

Luvenia Potts,
Regulations Development Coordinator,
Office of Regulation Policy & Management,
Office of the Secretary,
Department of Veterans Affairs.

Editorial note: This document was received for publication by the Office of the Federal Register on January 15, 2021.

For the reasons stated in the preamble, the Department of Veterans Affairs amends 38 CFR parts 36 and 42 as set forth below:

PART 36 – LOAN GUARANTY

1. The authority citation for part 36 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 38 U.S.C. 501 and 3720.

§ 36.4340 [Amended]

2. In § 36.4340, amend paragraphs (k)(1)(i) introductory text and (k)(3) by removing “\$23,331” and adding in its place “\$23,607”.

PART 42—STANDARDS IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAM FRAUD CIVIL REMEDIES ACT

3. The authority citation for part 42 continues to read as follows:

Authority: Pub. L. 99–509, secs. 6101–6104, 100 Stat. 1874, codified at 31 U.S.C. 3801–3812.

§ 42.3 [Amended]

4. In § 42.3, amend paragraphs (a)(1)(iv) and (b)(1)(ii) by removing “\$11,665” and adding in its place “\$11,803”.

[FR Doc. 2021-01335 Filed: 2/1/2021 8:45 am; Publication Date: 2/2/2021]