



For Immediate Release

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California Law: Only Approved Tax Preparers Can File Your Taxes

The California Tax Education Council warns thousands of tax preparers do not have the required credentials to prepare tax returns professionally.

Sacramento, CA (February 11, 2026) – Tax season is here, and choosing the right tax preparer is more important than ever. Yet every year, many Californians select a tax preparer on a whim—risking their finances and personal information.

"When people are stressed about taxes, it's all too easy to fall for promises that seem too good to be true. Unfortunately, that's exactly how many scams begin," said Fernando Angell, chair of the [California Tax Education Council \(CTEC\)](#), a state-mandated nonprofit organization that registers almost 40,000 tax preparers statewide.

Unlike most states, California has strict standards for paid tax preparers. State law requires anyone who prepares tax returns for a fee to be either an [attorney](#) with the [State Bar of California](#), [certified public accountant \(CPA\)](#) with the [California Board of Accountancy](#), CTEC-registered tax preparer (CRTP), or IRS [enrolled agent \(EA\)](#).

Preparing taxes without the proper credentials is illegal in California and can result in penalties of up to \$5,000 from the [California Franchise Tax Board \(FTB\)](#), the enforcement arm of CTEC.

Even though professional tax preparers are required to sign the returns they prepare, taxpayers are ultimately responsible for everything reported on their tax return—whether it's correct, incorrect, or even fraudulent.

What to watch out for:

- **Guaranteed refunds:** Reputable preparers never promise a refund before reviewing your information.
- **Unsigned returns:** By law, preparers must sign your tax return and include their IRS Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN).
- **Suspicious fees:** Fees should be based on the complexity of your return, not the size of your refund.

"If they base anything where they get a piece of your refund, that is a red flag," Angell said.

CTEC is a nonprofit established by the California State Legislature in 1997 to protect taxpayers from fraud and unqualified tax preparers. Visit [ctec.org](#) for more information, or listen to the CTEC podcast at [taxpayerbeware.org](#), also available in Spanish.

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