

For Immediate Release

The California Tax Education Council Warns Taxpayers of Common Tax Refund Scams

CTEC warns against the most common ways scammers steal taxpayer refunds.

Sacramento, CA (March 11, 2026) — Tax season isn't just about gathering paperwork—it is also a time when scammers are especially active, targeting unsuspecting taxpayers.

“A lot of people don't know that tax preparers aren't allowed to charge a fee based on the size of your refund,” said Fernando Angell, chair of the [California Tax Education Council \(CTEC\)](#), the state-mandated nonprofit that oversees approximately 40,000 tax preparers. “It's also important to stay away from advertisements that guarantee tax refunds—no legitimate preparer can promise a refund before reviewing your information.”

Angell emphasizes that the best way to maximize your refund and avoid IRS issues is to work with a tax preparer who is properly educated and current on tax laws. In California, anyone who prepares tax returns for a fee must be either an [attorney](#), a [certified public accountant \(CPA\)](#), a [CTEC-registered tax preparer \(CRTP\)](#), or an [enrolled agent \(EA\)](#).

Despite these requirements, some “ghost” preparers continue to operate illegally, often taking clients' money and disappearing.

“These scammers are tough to track down because they vanish after getting paid,” said Lester Crawford, CRTP and CTEC board member. “Every year, we hear from people who never see their refund or the preparer again.”

Three Key Facts to Protect Your Refund:

- **Your refund should always go directly to you.** Never allow a preparer to deposit your refund into their own bank account.
- **Fees should be based on the complexity of your return—not the size of your refund.** Avoid anyone who charges a percentage of your refund as their fee.
- **Be cautious of 'guaranteed' refunds.** No reputable preparer will promise a refund before reviewing your information; they will only ensure you receive what you're entitled to under the law.

CTEC protects taxpayers from fraud and unqualified preparers. To learn more or report unregistered tax preparers, visit [ctec.org](#). Listen to helpful podcasts at [taxpayerbeware.org](#) and in Spanish at [contribuyentecuidese.org](#).

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