

EMPLOYMENT LAWSCENE ALERT: ROADMAP EMERGES FOR CLAIMING THREE TYPES OF EMPLOYER TAX CREDITS ALLOWED UNDER COVID-19 STIMULUS LAWS

Under a flurry of recent legislation, Congress has created several tax credits to reimburse employers for paying certain types of wages during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. Until now, the precise mechanism for claiming these tax credits has been unclear. With the March 30 IRS issuance of guidance and a draft version of Form 7200, however, the process by which employers may realize the tax relief is coming into view.

With respect to tax credits for the cost of: (1) emergency paid sick leave; (2) expanded family medical leave; and (3) employee retention payments, we now know that eligible employers can reduce the amount of employer payroll taxes otherwise required to be deposited with the IRS. Specified payroll taxes can be reduced dollar-for-dollar by the amount of credit-eligible wages paid. The reduction in employer payroll taxes will be reflected on the employer's quarterly payroll tax returns, using the appropriate form from the 941 series. To the extent that the amount of the available tax credit exceeds the total amount of payroll tax deposits, however, an employer may use Form 7200, entitled "Advance Payment of Employer Credits Due to COVID-19," to request expedited payment of the excess credit amount.

Emergency Paid Sick Leave and Expanded FMLA Leave

We have [previously](#) described the emergency paid sick leave and expanded family medical leave required to be provided to qualifying employees between April 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020. These expanded types of leave were implemented by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which also provided for employer tax credits to reimburse employers for 100% of the cost of corresponding wages paid.

Employee Retention Credit

The newer employee retention credit (described in more detail [here](#)) is available to eligible employers under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and is designed to encourage businesses to keep employees on their payrolls.

The amount of the refundable employee retention tax credit is 50% of up to \$10,000 in wages paid, per employee, between March 12, 2020 and December 31, 2020 by an eligible employer whose business has been financially impacted by COVID-19. Some limits based upon employer size apply to the number of employees for whom the credit may be claimed. The class of employers eligible for the credit *excludes* state and local government employers, as well as employers who take small business loans under the Paycheck Protection Program.

For purposes of the employee retention credit, an eligible employer of any size (including a tax-exempt organization) will be deemed to have been financially impacted by COVID-19 if:

1. the employer's business has been fully or partially suspended by government order due to COVID-19 during a 2020 calendar quarter; and
2. the employer's gross receipts are below 50% of the comparable quarter in 2019. Once the employer's gross receipts exceed 80% of a comparable quarter in 2019, then eligibility for the credit is extinguished as of the immediately following quarter.

Note that while an employer is permitted to receive tax credits for emergency paid sick leave and expanded family medical leave under the FFCRA, as well as for the CARES Act employee retention payments, these tax credits cannot be applied to the same wages.