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EXCLUSIVE POLICY

DHS Seeks to Deputize IRS Officers to Help With Deportation Effort

Tax-collecting agency has thousands of special agents in its criminal-investigation division

By [Tarini Parti](#) [Follow](#) and [Richard Rubin](#) [Follow](#)

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The Internal Revenue Service headquarters near the National Mall in Washington, D.C. PHOTO: CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

WASHINGTON—The Department of Homeland Security has asked Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to deputize some law-enforcement workers, including IRS criminal investigators, to assist in immigration enforcement, according to documents viewed by The Wall Street Journal.

In a memo dated Feb. 7, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem requested Bessent provide agents who would help investigate financial flows involving human-trafficking networks and businesses that employ illegal immigrants. The agents could help arrest, detain and transport people.

The ask by Noem follows a broader effort by the Trump administration to deputize law-enforcement officials at various agencies to help carry out deportations. A previous memo granted immigration-enforcement authority to agencies at the Justice Department, including the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the U.S. Marshals Service.

The Internal Revenue Service's criminal-investigation division, or IRS-CI, has 2,290 special agents, according to its most recent annual report, and that is up 10% since 2022. The tax agency has been adding enforcement staff, including criminal investigators, since the then-Democratic-controlled Congress voted in 2022 to expand the IRS and give it more resources.

President Trump and Republicans opposed that expansion, and the president has occasionally made offhand remarks about diverting IRS employees to the border. Trump has promised the largest mass-deportation campaign in U.S. history. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has been trying to increase arrests in recent weeks.

"It is DHS's understanding that the Department of Treasury has qualified law enforcement personnel available to assist with immigration enforcement, especially in light of recent increases to the Internal Revenue Service's work force and budget," Noem said in the memo.

The IRS criminal investigators are law-enforcement officers who can make arrests, and they often carry firearms, just like other federal agents. They are different from the IRS's revenue agents and revenue officers, the tax agency's name for auditors and collections workers, respectively.

IRS-CI agents investigate criminal tax evasion and other financial crimes, and they often work in tandem with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other agencies. They track financial flows and have worked on cases attacking some of the Trump administration's priorities, such as fentanyl trafficking and fraud involving government programs.

In 2024, according to the report, they identified \$2.1 billion in tax fraud and \$7 billion in other financial crimes.

The IRS is currently being run by acting commissioner Douglas O'Donnell, a career agency employee. Trump has picked Billy Long, a former Missouri congressman, to run the IRS, but he hasn't yet been confirmed by the Senate.

Write to Tarini Parti at tarini.parti@wsj.com and Richard Rubin at richard.rubin@wsj.com

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