

**From:** Christi Grab [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** FTB March 28 Board Meeting Item 1.1: Funding for Customer Service and Item 5: Workforce Succession Planning  
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Dear Board Members:

In the Board Meeting Agenda for March 28, 2023, Item 1.1 is a request for more funds for customer service agents in various departments.

I want to start this letter off by saying that I fully support additional funding for customer service agents. As I had stated in March 2021 when I voiced opposition to increasing the litigation budget, it is my belief that the increase in litigation costs was directly tied to the poor customer service that FTB offered. I believe that once FTB offers better customer service, the litigation costs will decrease. The document requesting the funds has confirmed my beliefs.

In the section titled "Contact Center Retention," FTB stated that it has a heavy attrition rate for new customer service employees. It cited the reason as "the nature of the work can be stressful..." As someone who has experienced the living hell that FTB calls "customer service," and as someone who has watched FTB closely for the last seven years, I have some specific feedback that may help reduce the attrition rates.

Issue 1:

It is my personal belief that the high attrition rate is tied to FTB's demanding its employees engage in unethical and unlawful behaviors as a part of their job duties. Even if the employees themselves have not been asked to do anything unethical, anyone with a strong moral compass will still quit once they find out that their coworkers are engaging in behaviors such as: 1. instructing taxpayers to send more money than the bill states is due, then falsifying records to hide the overcharge, 2. not applying estimated tax payments that were supposed to be immediately applied until after late penalties have been falsely imposed, 3. repeatedly "misapplying" payments in order to falsely impose late penalties, and/or 4. misrepresenting what the laws say to deceive taxpayers. And these are only a few examples of unethical and unlawful behaviors that FTB customer service representatives have done me. I can cite many more examples.

Likewise, from what I have seen, FTB operates in a manner in which employees are encouraged to throw one another under the bus, such as committing suborning perjury or making Christopher Calhoun and the Taxpayer Advocates sign letters that they didn't author which contained unlawful and fraudulent statements. I think most people would start job hunting once they saw that kind of back stabbing happen to someone else. I think that most people realize that it's only a matter of time before they became the victims of such predatory behaviors.

It is my belief that FTB will never be able to solve its high attrition rate until it changes its business practices to be completely lawful. I believe that this generation of young people now entering the labor market has been trained to not engage in "unfair" behaviors. I think most young people will refuse to be part of an organization which commits such atrocities.

Issue 2:

Does the FTB still list the main customer service line on all notices, even when the main customer service cannot help the taxpayer? In 2017, I asked that this practice to be changed in one of my ATBOR requests. FTB's circuitous response indicated that FTB would continue to put the main customer service number on all notices, even when a different number needed to be called.

When this happens, the taxpayer needs to write down the correct phone number, hang up, and then call a specialty division (ie, collections). This leaves the taxpayers angry and frustrated. Dealing with such angry people probably adds a lot of unnecessary stress which contributes to the high attrition rate.

Issue 3:

Under the section titled "Correspondence," the documents states "With the existing level of resources, this service channel has been able to process written (paper) correspondence within a four-to-five-month period. FTB's goal for responding to correspondence is 30 calendar days. We typically process MyFTB Message correspondence within 30 days whereas our desired goal is 10 days to encourage the use of MyFTB."

Could you please explain why FTB processes these two different types of correspondence in different timeframes, and address why FTB believes that this policy does not violate R&TC 21027, which specifically says that all correspondence must be processed in the same timeframes no matter what the method of delivery.

It is my opinion that 30-calendar days is an unacceptable goal for correspondence sent via USPS, as is the goal of 10-days for MyFTB.

When FTB issues a notice, the taxpayer generally has 15 - 60 days to respond (depending on the type of notice). In this document, FTB did not disclose how its failure to timely process correspondence leads to FTB agents mercilessly harassing people for "not responding," that FTB falsely imposes penalties, and FTB ignores Protests.

Because of the time sensitive nature of the correspondence, all correspondence, no matter whether sent via overnight express, fax, MyFTB or USPS should be processed within 48-hours. I believe that it is imperative that FTB request more staff — and that the Board grant the request — so that FTB can reduce the turn time for correspondence to 48-hours and maintain it at that level. As you will read in Issue 4, the slow processing times for correspondence is a major factor in what makes the the customer service agents' jobs so stressful.

Issue 4:

Under the section titled "Taxpayer Services Call Center", it states "Customer service agents are responsible for the following tasks:...

Facilitate the payment of balances due, analyze and correct individual and business entity account errors and provide information regarding taxpayer liabilities, filing enforcement assessments and



collection notice.

Resolve post-filing return correction and balance due issues prior to formal involuntary collection action.

Promote voluntary compliance through taxpayer education and pre-filing assistance by providing general tax information, processing form requests, and explaining filing requirements, tax law, policy, and procedures.

Let me explain why Issue 4 directly ties to Issue 3. There were many times when I became hysterical with FTB's assorted customer service agents. The agents insisted that the estimated tax payments that I had made had never been received, that the canceled checks proving that FTB already had the money in hand that I had sent multiple times were never received, that my multiple Protest letters had never been received, and insisted that I needed to send tens of thousand of extra dollars to cover the money that had already been paid plus the penalties that had been falsely imposed RIGHT NOW OR ELSE. Using FTB's own records that FTB submitted to the court in *Grab vs. FTB*, I documented that FTB imposed not only one, but two, false wage garnishments against my husband. I am sure it must have been tremendously stressful for the agents who had to "correct" these two "errors" when I was at peak hysteria over my money "disappearing."

I don't believe that anyone with a strong moral compass can watch FTB destroy people's lives with aggressive behaviors such as wage garnishments that result from FTB's own gross negligence to process correspondence timely. I believe that the attrition rate will not improve until FTB timely processes all correspondence received, no matter what method of delivery.

Issue 5:

Under the section titled "Taxpayer Services Call Center", it states "Customer service agents are responsible for the following tasks:...

Facilitate the payment of balances due, analyze and correct individual and business entity account errors and provide information regarding taxpayer liabilities, filing enforcement assessments and collection notice.

Resolve post-filing return correction and balance due issues prior to formal involuntary collection action.

Promote voluntary compliance through taxpayer education and pre-filing assistance by providing general tax information, processing form requests, and explaining filing requirements, tax law, policy, and procedures.

It is my belief that less people would call in less if more information was disclosed online about *exactly* when payments are applied to taxpayer's account. It would also help the agents to be able to point to where the information can be found online.

For example, I documented that I called FTB 33 times regarding 12 "lost" payments before a customer service agent finally disclosed to me that the 12 payments were never lost, they were intentionally withheld per FTB's standard operating procedures. Had that information been disclosed online, it would have saved 33 angry phone calls to FTB. Almost all of the calls took more than an hour. It took up a tremendous amount of the FTB employees time to look for the "lost" payments.

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FTB has still failed to disclose online *exactly* when payments that are supposed to be "immediately applied" are *actually* applied to the taxpayer's account. It isn't fair to your agents to have to deal with someone who is hysterical because the NPA says they made no estimated tax payments when they had actually made five payments totaling [REDACTED]. How does someone feel good about trying to justify the disappearance of monies from FTB's official records (especially when the money "disappearing" lead to the imposition of penalties that wouldn't have otherwise been imposed) when there are no official sources to point to?

The agent who disclosed the withholding policy said to me "Withholding estimated tax payments is required by law." I replied with "Which law?" She said, "I don't know, but it is." Not being able to point to a place on FTB's website to corroborate her claims must have made her feel like a slime bag.

**I again remind you that the taxpayers are your employers. It is your duty to your employers (us taxpayers) provide full disclosure about exactly what you do with the money you collect from us.** Such disclosure would benefit FTB tremendously by reducing the number of angry phone calls, and thus reduce how stressful the job is for the customer service agents, and thus improve employee retention rates.

In closing, I believe that FTB's attrition rates can be easily reduced by implementing the above five suggestions. Thank you for your consideration of my suggestions.

Regards,

Christine Grab