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Cities Look to Delinquent Taxes, Fees, Fines for Relief

By Jeff Bean

From Main Street to Wall Street, nearly every U.S. city has felt the impact of this past year’s financial crisis. Simultaneously faced with a deteriorating tax base and growing demands for essential public services, many cities are looking to their delinquent accounts receivable for relief. Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson, LLP has been helping its city clientele do just that for over three decades. “More and more cities are discovering that there are often millions of dollars in delinquent taxes, fees and fines that can be collected with the right plan and resources in place,” said Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson, LLP Partner and Chief Marketing Officer Mike Vallandingham. Linebarger Goggan is a Platinum Partner and longtime Business Council Member of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Their practice is focused on the collection of past due government receivables.

According to Vallandingham, it takes the right combination of operational capacity, experience and good people to drive a successful collection program. And, he went on to add that, “In this economic environment, when so many people are unemployed or underemployed, it also takes a respectful and understanding approach to dealing with those who owe our clients money.” Often, payment plans are the only answer and Linebarger Goggan can manage those as well.

Vallandingham noted that cities across the country are literally missing out on “free money” in the form of uncollected taxes, traffic citations and parking tickets simply because they are too strapped in terms of the financial and staffing resources it takes to go after it. “I personally do not believe there has ever been a better time for cities to consider a public-private partnership with the right collection firm,” said Vallandingham.

When selecting a professional collection firm with which to partner, Vallandingham explained that cities should always consider relevant experience and references, a history of success in the public sector, technology and capacity to handle a high volume of accounts and in a secure manner, and the ability and willingness to provide customized solutions to their clients. He went on to add that, “While the fees charged should be considered of course, buyer beware – you will definitely get what you pay for and cheaper is rarely better in our industry. Thus, pricing should only be one factor in the evaluation criteria and better yet negotiated with the selected firm.”

“For many years we heard from mayors throughout the country about how big a problem delinquent accounts receivables, such as taxes, were for cities,” said Conference of Mayors CEO and Executive Director Tom Cochran. “That’s why we were pleased to add Linebarger Goggan as a USCM Platinum Partner in 2007, to help our city members successfully manage this issue and increase the revenue going into their coffers both. It is also a matter of fundamental fairness to the vast majority of Americans who always pay their taxes on time.”

More than 500 cities have turned to Linebarger Goggan for help in collecting their delinquent taxes, fees, fines, service charges, and other miscellaneous government debts. The firm has dozens of offices located coast-to-coast. Linebarger Goggan will help its government clients recover nearly \$1 billion this year alone.

For more information about Linebarger Goggan, contact U.S. Mayor Enterprises COO Kathryn Kretschmer Weyland at 301-351-4350 or kweyland@usmayors.org or Jeff Bean at jbean@usmayors.org.

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Note: Mike Vallandingham is no longer an employee of Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson, LLP. He has retired from the law firm.