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POLITICS

Elon Musk creates confusion about IRS' Direct File — but the free tax program is still available



ore Elon Musk speaks at an indoor Presidential Inauguration parade event in Washington, Monday, Jan. 20, 2025. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

BY [FATIMA HUSSEIN](#) AND [BARBARA ORTUTAY](#)

Updated 8:59 PM EST, February 3, 2025

WASHINGTON (AP) — Billionaire tech mogul Elon Musk posted Monday on his social media site that he had “deleted” 18F, a government agency that worked on technology projects

such as the IRS' Direct File program. This led to some confusion about whether Direct File is still available to taxpayers, but the free filing program is still available, at least for the coming tax season.

While Musk's tweet may have intimated that the group of workers had been eliminated, an individual with knowledge of the IRS workforce said the Direct File program was still accepting tax returns. The individual spoke anonymously with The Associated Press because they were not authorized to talk to the press.

As of Monday evening, 18F's website was still operational, as was the Direct File website. But the digital services agency's X account was deleted.

The [IRS announced](#) last year that it will make the free [electronic tax return filing system](#) permanent and asked all 50 states and the District of Columbia to help taxpayers file their returns through the program in 2025.

The Direct File trial began in March 2024. But the IRS has faced intense blowback to Direct File from private tax preparation companies that have made billions from charging people to use their software and have spent millions [lobbying Congress](#). The average American typically spends about \$140 preparing their returns each year.

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Commercial tax prep companies that have lobbied against development of the free file program say free file options already exist.

Several organizations, including private tax firms, offer free online tax preparation assistance to taxpayers under certain income limits. Fillable forms are available online on the IRS website, but they are complicated and taxpayers still have to calculate their tax liability.

Last May the IRS announced it would make the Direct File program permanent. It is now available in 25 states, up from 12 states that were part of last year's pilot program.

The program allows people in some states with very simple W-2s to calculate and submit their returns directly to the IRS. Those using the pilot program in 2024 claimed more than \$90 million in refunds, the IRS said in October.

During his confirmation hearing Jan. 16, [Scott Bessent](#), now treasury secretary, committed to maintaining the Direct File program at least for the 2025 tax season, which [began Jan. 27](#).

Musk was responding to a post by an X user who called 18F “far left” and mused that Direct File “puts the government in charge” of preparing people’s taxes.

“That group has been deleted,” Musk wrote.



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