

STATE OF NEW YORK

DIVISION OF TAX APPEALS

In the Matter of the Petition :
of :
XIAO TU ZHANG : DETERMINATION
for Revision of Determinations or for Refunds of Sales and : DTA NO. 829343
Use Taxes under Articles 28 and 29 of the Tax Law for the :
Period December 1, 2016 through August 31, 2017. :

Petitioner, Xiao Tu Zhang, filed a petition for revision of determinations or for refund of sales and use taxes under articles 28 and 29 of the Tax Law for the period December 1, 2016 through August 31, 2017.

The Division of Taxation, by its representative, Amanda Hiller, Esq. (Brandon Batch, Esq., of counsel), brought a motion, dated June 24, 2020, seeking an order dismissing the petition or, in the alternative, summary determination in the above-referenced matter pursuant to sections 3000.5, 3000.9 (a) (i) and (b) of the Rules of Practice and Procedure of the Tax Appeals Tribunal. Petitioner, appearing pro se, filed a response on July 14, 2020.¹ Based upon the motion papers, the affidavits and documents submitted therewith, and all pleadings and documents submitted in connection with this matter, Kevin R. Law, Administrative Law Judge, renders the following determination.

ISSUE

Whether petitioner filed a timely request for conciliation conference with the Bureau of

¹ The response was filed by attorney Jie Tan on behalf of petitioner. Upon receipt, the Division of Tax Appeals informed Mr. Tan that a completed power of attorney (form TA-105) would be required for Mr. Tan to represent petitioner in proceedings before the Division of Tax Appeals. No response was received from Mr. Tan.

Conciliation and Mediation Services following the issuance of notices of determination and a notice of estimated determination.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The subject of the motion of the Division of Taxation (Division) is the timeliness of petitioner's protest of two notices of determination (notice numbers L-048300812 and L-048300813) and one notice of estimated determination (notice number L-048300811) each dated June 11, 2018 (collectively, the notices). The notices assert tax against petitioner, Xiao Tu Zhang, as a responsible person of Grand Sichuan West Village, Inc. (the restaurant). The notices are all addressed to petitioner at an address in Brooklyn, New York.

2. Petitioner faxed a request for conciliation conference with the Division's Bureau of Conciliation and Mediation Services (BCMS) in protest of the notices on January 24, 2019.

3. On March 1, 2019, BCMS issued a conciliation order dismissing request (conciliation order) to petitioner. The conciliation order determined that petitioner's protest of the notices was untimely and stated, in part:

“The Tax Law requires that a request be filed within 90 days from the date of the statutory notice. Since the notice(s) was issued on June 11, 2018, but the request was not mailed until January 24, 2019, or in excess of 90 days, the request is late filed.”

4. Petitioner filed a timely petition with the Division of Tax Appeals in protest of the conciliation order on April 22, 2019.

5. To show proof of proper mailing of the notices, the Division provided the following with its motion papers: (i) an affidavit, dated June 8, 2020, of Deena Picard, a Data Processing Fiscal Systems Auditor 3 and Acting Director of the Division's Management Analysis and Project Services Bureau (MAPS); (ii) a “Certified Record for Presort Mail - Assessments Receivable” (CMR), postmarked June 11, 2018; (iii) a copies of the notices with the associated

mailing cover sheets; (iv) an affidavit, dated June 12, 2020, of Susan Saccocio, the manager of the division's mail room; (v) a copy of petitioner's request for conciliation conference, dated and faxed to BCMS on January 24, 2019; (vi) a copy of the conciliation order issued to petitioner on March 1, 2019; and (vii) a copy of petitioner's form IT-201, resident income tax return for the year 2017, filed on March 16, 2018, which lists the same address for petitioner as that listed on the notices, the request for conciliation conference and the petition. The 2017 income tax return was the last return filed with the Division by petitioner before the notices were issued.

6. The affidavit of Deena Picard, who has been in her current position since May 2017, and a Data Processing Fiscal Systems Auditor 3 since February 2006, sets forth the Division's general practice and procedure for processing statutory notices. Ms. Picard is the Acting Director of MAPS, which is responsible for the receipt and storage of CMRs, and is familiar with the Division's Case and Resource Tracking System (CARTS) and the Division's past and present procedures as they relate to statutory notices. Statutory notices are generated from CARTS and are predated with the anticipated date of mailing. Each page of the CMR lists an initial date that is approximately 10 days in advance of the anticipated date of mailing. Following the Division's general practice, this date was manually changed on the first and last page of the CMR in the present case to the actual mailing date of "6/11/18." In addition, as described by Ms. Picard, generally all pages of the CMR are banded together when the documents are delivered into possession of the United States Postal Service (USPS) and remain so when returned to the Division. The pages of the CMR stay banded together unless otherwise ordered. The page numbers of the CMR run consecutively, starting with "PAGE: 1," and are noted in the upper right corner of each page.

7. All notices are assigned a certified control number. The certified control number of each notice is listed on a separate one-page mailing cover sheet, which also bears a bar code, the mailing address and the Departmental return address on the front, and taxpayer assistance information on the back. The certified control number is also listed on the CMR under the heading entitled "Certified No." The CMR lists each notice in the order the notices are generated in the batch. The assessment numbers are listed under the heading "Reference No." The names and addresses of the recipients are listed under "Name of Addressee, Street, and PO Address."

8. The CMR in the present matter consists of 11 pages and lists 111 certified control numbers along with corresponding assessment numbers, names and addresses. Each page of the CMR includes 11 such entries, with the exception of page 11, which contains 1 entry. Ms. Picard notes that the copy of the CMR that is attached to her affidavit has been redacted to preserve the confidentiality of information relating to taxpayers who are not involved in this proceeding. A USPS representative affixed a postmark dated June 11, 2018 to each page of the CMR, wrote the number "111" on page 11, next to the heading "Total Pieces Received at Post Office," and initialed or signed page 11.

9. Page 4 of the CMR indicates that notices with certified control numbers 7104 1002 9730 0255 9946, 7104 1002 9730 0255 9953, 7104 1002 9730 0255 9960 and assessment ID numbers L-048300811, L-048300812 and L-048300813, respectively, were mailed to petitioner at the Brooklyn, New York, address listed on the notices. The corresponding mailing cover sheets, attached to the Picard affidavit as exhibit "B," bears these certified control numbers and petitioner's name and address as noted.

10. The affidavit of Susan Saccocio describes the mail room's general operations and procedures. Ms. Saccocio has been the mail room manager since 2017 and, as a result, is familiar with the practices of the mailroom with regard to statutory notices. The mail room receives the notices and places them in an "Outgoing Certified Mail" area. Ms. Saccocio confirms that a mailing cover sheet precedes each notice. A staff member retrieves the notices and mailing cover sheets and operates a machine that puts each notice and mailing cover sheet into a windowed envelope. Staff members then weigh, seal and place postage on each envelope. The first and last pieces of mail are checked against the information on the CMR. A clerk then performs a random review of up to 30 pieces listed on the CMR, by checking those envelopes against the information listed on the CMR. A staff member then delivers the envelopes and the CMR to one of the various USPS branches located in the Albany, New York, area. A USPS employee affixes a postmark and also places his or her initials or signature on the CMR, indicating receipt by the post office. The mail room further requests that the USPS either circle the total number of pieces received or indicate the total number of pieces received by writing the number on the CMR.

11. Each of the 11 pages of the CMR attached to the Picard affidavit as exhibit "A" contains a USPS postmark of June 11, 2018. On page 11, corresponding to "Total Pieces and Amounts," is the preprinted number 111 and next to "Total Pieces Received at Post Office," the USPS employee wrote the number "111," wrote his or her initials or a signature, and affixed a postmark. According to Mr. Saccocio the affixation of the postmarks and the USPS employee's initials indicate that all of the 111 articles of mail listed on the CMR, including the article addressed to petitioner, were received by the USPS on June 11, 2018.

12. According to both the Picard and Saccocio affidavits, copies of the notices were mailed to petitioner on June 11, 2018.

13. In opposition, petitioner submitted his affidavit wherein he avers that the first notice that he received from the Division were collection letters sent to the restaurant. Attached to petitioner's affidavit are collection letters from the Division to the restaurant and to petitioner. Petitioner avers that, after having received the collection notice, he immediately called the Division but had a difficult time getting through. In addition, petitioner also challenged the underlying merits of the notices, claiming that said notices were issued to him as a responsible person of a restaurant with which he was no longer associated. Petitioner requests that the motion be denied and a hearing on the merits.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

A. As noted, the Division brings a motion to dismiss the petition under section 3000.9 (a) of the Rules of Practice and Procedure (Rules) or, in the alternative, a motion for summary determination under section 3000.9 (b). As the petition in this matter was filed within 90 days of the conciliation order, the Division of Tax Appeals has jurisdiction over the petition and, accordingly, a motion for summary determination under section 3000.9 (b) of the Rules is the proper vehicle to consider the timeliness of petitioner's request for conciliation conference. This determination shall address the instant motion as such.

B. A motion for summary determination "shall be granted if, upon all the papers and proof submitted, the administrative law judge finds that it has been established sufficiently that no material and triable issue of fact is presented" (20 NYCRR 3000.9 [b] [1]).

C. Section 3000.9 (c) of the Rules provides that a motion for summary determination is subject to the same provisions as a motion for summary judgment pursuant to CPLR 3212.

“The proponent of a summary judgment motion must make a prima facie showing of entitlement to judgment as a matter of law, tendering sufficient evidence to eliminate any material issues of fact from the case” (*Winegrad v New York Univ. Med. Ctr.*, 64 NY2d 851, 853 [1985], citing *Zuckerman v City of New York*, 49 NY2d 557, 562 [1980]). As summary judgment is the procedural equivalent of a trial, it should be denied if there is any doubt as to the existence of a triable issue or where the material issue of fact is “arguable” (*Glick & Dolleck v Tri-Pac Export Corp.*, 22 NY2d 439 [1968]; *Museums at Stony Brook v Village of Patchogue Fire Dept.*, 146 AD2d 572 [2d Dept 1989]). If material facts are in dispute, or if contrary inferences may be drawn reasonably from undisputed facts, then a full trial is warranted and the case should not be decided on a motion (*Gerard v Inglese*, 11 AD2d 381 [2d Dept 1960]). “To defeat a motion for summary judgment, the opponent must . . . produce ‘evidentiary proof in admissible form sufficient to require a trial of material questions of fact on which he rests his claim’” (*Whelan v GTE Sylvania*, 182 AD2d 446, 449 [1st Dept 1992], citing *Zuckerman*).

D. A taxpayer may protest a notice of determination by filing a petition for a hearing with the Division of Tax Appeals within 90 days from date of mailing of such notice (Tax Law § 1138 [a] [1]). Alternatively, a taxpayer may contest a notice by filing a request for a conciliation conference with BCMS “if the time to petition for such a hearing has not elapsed” (Tax Law § 170 [3-a] [a]). It is well established that the 90-day statutory time limit for filing either a petition or a request for a conciliation conference is strictly enforced and that, accordingly, protests filed even one day late are considered untimely (*see Matter of American Woodcraft*, Tax Appeals Tribunal, May 15, 2003; *Matter of Maro Luncheonette*, Tax Appeals Tribunal, February 1, 1996). This is because, absent a timely protest, a notice of determination becomes a fixed and final assessment and, consequently, the Division of Tax Appeals is without

jurisdiction to consider the substantive merits of the protest (*see Matter of Lukacs*, Tax Appeals Tribunal, November 8, 2007; *Matter of Sak Smoke Shop*, Tax Appeals Tribunal, January 6, 1989).

E. Where, as here, the timeliness of a request for conciliation conference or petition is at issue, the initial inquiry is whether the Division has carried its burden of demonstrating the fact and date of the mailing to petitioner's last known address (Tax Law § 1147 [a] [1]; *see Matter of Katz*, Tax Appeals Tribunal, November 14, 1991). To meet its burden, the Division must show proof of a standard procedure used by the Division for the issuance of statutory notices by one with knowledge of the relevant procedures, and must also show proof that the standard procedure was followed in this particular instance (*see Matter of Katz; Matter of Novar TV & Air Conditioner Sales & Serv.*, Tax Appeals Tribunal, May 23, 1991).

F. Here, the Division has offered proof sufficient to establish the mailing of the notices to petitioner's last known address on June 11, 2018. The CMR has been properly completed and therefore constitutes highly probative documentary evidence of both the date and fact of mailing (*see Matter of Rakusin*, Tax Appeals Tribunal, July 26, 2001). The affidavits submitted by the Division adequately describe the Division's general mailing procedure as well as the relevant CMR and thereby establish that the general mailing procedure was followed in this case (*see Matter of DeWeese*, Tax Appeals Tribunal, June 20, 2002). Further, the address on the mailing cover sheets and CMR conforms with the address listed on petitioner's 2017 resident income tax return, which satisfies the "last known address" requirement. It is thus concluded that the Division properly mailed the notices on June 11, 2018, and the statutory 90-day time limit to file either a request for conciliation conference with BCMS or a petition with the Division of Tax Appeals commenced on that date (Tax Law §§ 170 [3-a] [a]; 1138 [a] [1]).

G. Since the Division has demonstrated proper mailing of the notice, such a showing gives rise to a presumption of receipt of the notice by the person to whom it is addressed (*see* Tax Law § 1147 [a] [1]). Here, petitioner did not contest that the Division properly mailed the notices to his address, but rather, he has asserted that he first became aware of the notices in late 2018 at which time he filed his protest which was dismissed at BCMS. Mere denial of receipt of the notices, without more, is not sufficient to overcome the statutory presumption of receipt (*see Matter of T.J. Gulf v New York State Tax Commn.*, 124 AD2d 314 [3d Dept 1986]; *Matter of Rosenbaum*, Tax Appeals Tribunal, November 5, 2018).

H. Petitioner's request for conciliation conference was filed on January 24, 2019. This date falls after the 90-day period of limitations for the filing of such a request. Consequently, the request was untimely filed (*see* Tax Law §§ 1138 [a] [1]; 170 [3-a] [b]) and was properly dismissed by the March 1, 2019 conciliation order issued by BCMS. Petitioner has offered no claim or evidence to meet his burden to prove that any timely protest was filed before the 90-day period of limitations for challenging the notices expired.

I. The Division's motion for summary determination is hereby granted, the petition of Xiao Tu Zhang is denied, and the March 1, 2019 conciliation order dismissing petitioner's request is sustained.

DATED: Albany, New York
October 22, 2020

/s/ Kevin R. Law
ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE