

STATE OF NEW YORK

DIVISION OF TAX APPEALS

In the Matter of the Petition	:	
of	:	
AMADOU O. SOW AND ADAMA CAMARA	:	DETERMINATION
	:	DTA NO. 829892
for Redetermination of Deficiency or for Refund of New York State and New York City Personal Income Tax under Article 22 of the Tax Law and the New York City Administrative Code for the Year 2018.	:	

Petitioners, Amadou O. Sow and Adama Camara, filed a petition for redetermination of deficiency or for refund of New York State and New York City personal income tax under article 22 of the Tax Law and the New York City Administrative Code for the year 2018.

The Division of Taxation, by its representative, Amanda Hiller, Esq. (Amy Seidenstock, Esq., of counsel), brought a motion dated November 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) and (b) of the Rules of Practice and Procedure of the Tax Appeals Tribunal. Petitioners, appearing pro se, did not respond to the Division of Taxation’s motion. The 90-day period for issuance of this determination commenced on December 24, 2020. Based upon the motion papers, the affidavits and documents submitted therewith, and all pleadings and documents submitted in connection with this matter, Nicholas A. Behuniak, Administrative Law Judge, renders the following determination.

ISSUE

Whether petitioners filed a timely request for a conciliation conference with the Bureau of Conciliation and Mediation Services following the issuance of a notice of deficiency.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The subject of the motion of the Division of Taxation (Division) is the timeliness of petitioners' protest of a notice of deficiency dated October 21, 2019 and bearing assessment identification number L-050190110 (notice). The notice was addressed to petitioners, Amadou O. Sow and Adama Camara, at an address in Jamaica, New York.

2. Petitioners filed a request for conciliation conference (request) with the Division's Bureau of Conciliation and Mediation Services (BCMS) in protest of the notice. The request was signed by petitioners on February 10, 2020 and received by BCMS on February 11, 2020.

3. On March 6, 2020, BCMS issued a conciliation order dismissing request (conciliation order) to petitioners.¹ The conciliation order determined that petitioners' protest of the notice 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 October 21, 2019, but the request was not received until February 11, 2020, or in excess of 90 days, the request is late filed.”

4. Petitioners filed a timely petition with the Division of Tax Appeals in protest of the conciliation order on March 11, 2020.

5. To show proof of proper mailing of the notice, the Division provided the following: (i) an affidavit of Deena Picard, a Data Processing Fiscal Systems Auditor 3 and Acting Director of the Division's Management Analysis and Project Services Bureau (MAPS), dated October 7, 2020; (ii) a certified mail register titled: “CERTIFIED RECORD FOR – DTF – 962-F-E – Not of

¹ Petitioners included two letters from BCMS with their petition. One, dated March 6, 2020, bears CMS No. 000318933, and corresponds to the CMS No. on the conciliation order with the same date and references the notice at issue herein. The other letter, dated February 26, 2020, bears CMS No. 000318859, which corresponds to a separate tax matter that was not reflected on the petition itself and appears to have been resolved by the parties prior to a BCMS conference for that matter and thus will not be addressed herein.

Def Follow Up” (CMR) postmarked October 21, 2019; (iii) an affidavit of Susan Saccocio, a manager in the Division’s mail room, dated October 15, 2020; (iv) a copy of the notice with the associated mailing cover sheet addressed to petitioners; (v) an affidavit of the Division’s attorney, Amy Seidenstock, dated November 18, 2020; and, (vi) a copy of the petitioners’ e-filed New York State personal income tax return (form IT-201) for the year 2018, which lists the same address for petitioners as that listed on the notices, except that petitioners’ address on the notice includes an additional four zip code digits to petitioners’ five-digit zip code and the address on the notice did not include a hyphen between the address numbers that were reflected in the address on the return, i.e., 134-17 was reflected as 13417 on the notice. According to the affidavit of Amy Seidenstock, the 2018 income tax return, filed on February 9, 2019, was the last return filed with the Division by petitioners before the notice was issued. The Division also provided with its motion papers a printout from the United States Postal Service (USPS) website, entitled “Look Up A Zip Code,” which reflects that petitioners’ Jamaica, New York, address, with the zip code “11434,” as petitioners listed it on their tax return, corresponds to the identical USPS mailing address with zip code “11434-3725.” The USPS verified address is the address to which the notice was mailed.

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 familiar with the Division’s Case and Resource Tracking System (CARTS), which generates statutory notices prior to mailing. As the Acting Director of MAPS, which is responsible for the receipt and storage of CMRs, Ms. Picard is familiar with 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 a 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 is manually changed on the first and last page of a CMR to the actual date of mailing, in this instance to "10/21/19." 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 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 P.O. ADDRESS."

8. The October 21, 2019 CMR consists of 1 page and lists 10 certified control numbers along with corresponding assessment numbers, names and addresses. Ms. Picard notes that the copy of the CMR 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 October 21, 2019 to the CMR, initialed and wrote and circled the number "10" next to the

heading "TOTAL PIECES RECEIVED AT POST OFFICE".

9. The CMR indicates that a notice of deficiency with certified control number 7104 1002 9735 5211 0161 and assessment ID number L-050190110, was mailed to petitioners at the Jamaica, New York, address listed on the notice. The corresponding mailing cover sheet, attached to the Picard affidavit as exhibit "B," bears this certified control number and petitioners' name and address as noted.

10. The affidavit of Susan Saccocio describes the general operations and procedures of the Division's mail room. Ms. Saccocio has been a manager in the mail room since 2017 and has been employed there since 2012, and as a result, is familiar with the practices of the mail room 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 contained on the CMR. A clerk then performs a random review of 30 or fewer pieces listed on the CMR by checking those envelopes against the information contained 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 USPS employee initialed the CMR and affixed a postmark to the CMR. 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. A review of

the October 21, 2019 CMR indicates that the USPS employee complied with this request by writing and circling the number of pieces received on the CMR.

11. According to the affidavits submitted, a copy of the notice was properly mailed to petitioners at their Jamaica, New York, address on the date indicated as claimed.

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 petitioners' 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, Inc. v Tri-Pac Export Corp.*, 22 NY2d 439, 441 [1968]; *Museums at Stony Brook v Vil. 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, 382 [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. Petitioners did not respond to the Division's motion. Accordingly, they are deemed to have conceded that no question of fact requiring a hearing exists (*see Kuehne & Nagel v Baiden*, 36 NY2d 539 [1975]; *John William Costello Assocs. v Standard Metals Corp.*, 99 AD2d 227 [1st Dept 1984], *appeal dismissed* 62 NY2d 942 [1984]). Petitioners have presented no evidence to contest the facts alleged in the Picard, Saccocio or Seidenstock affidavits; consequently, those facts are deemed admitted (*Kuehne & Nagel v Baiden*, at 544; *Whelan v GTE Sylvania*).

E. A taxpayer may protest a notice of deficiency by filing a petition for a hearing with the Division of Tax Appeals within 90 days from date of mailing of such notice (*see Tax Law* §§ 681 [b]; 689 [b]). 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 e.g. 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 deficiency 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).

F. Where, as here, the timeliness of a request for conciliation conference is at issue, the initial inquiry is whether the Division has carried its burden of demonstrating the fact and date of the mailing to petitioners' last known address (*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).

G. Here, the Division has offered proof sufficient to establish the mailing of the notice to petitioners' last known address on October 21, 2019. 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 sheet and CMR conform with the address listed on petitioners' 2018

personal income tax return which satisfies the “last known address” requirement.² It is thus concluded that the Division properly mailed the notice on October 21, 2019, 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]; 681 [b]; 689 [b]). Since the BCMS conciliation conference request form was not filed until February 11, 2020, or in excess of 90 days from the issuance of the October 21, 2019 notice, the petition is untimely, and the Division of Tax Appeals is without jurisdiction to provide a hearing to address the merits of the notice (*see Matter of Abdullah*, Tax Appeals Tribunal, April 14, 2017).

H. The Division's motion for summary determination is hereby granted, the petition of Amadou O. Sow and Adama Camara is denied and the March 6, 2020 conciliation order dismissing petitioners' request is sustained.

DATED: Albany, New York
March 18, 2021

/s/ Nicholas A. Behuniak
ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE

² While it is noted that the Division added 4 additional zip code digits to petitioners' zip code and removed a hyphen between address numbers as compared to the address reflected on petitioners' 2018 personal income tax return filed, such differences are deemed inconsequential (*see Matter of Perk*, Tax Appeals Tribunal, December 13, 2001; *Matter of Combemale*, Tax Appeals Tribunal March 31, 1994; *Lee v Commissioner*, T.C. Memo 2011-129 [2011]). Moreover, petitioners do not contend that the notice was improperly addressed, nor do they dispute receipt of the notice. Therefore, it is deemed admitted that the address on the notice was petitioners' last known address.