

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

DIVISION OF TAXATION

ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING

FINAL DECISION AND ORDER

#2014-20

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE
DIVISION OF TAXATION
ONE CAPITOL HILL
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02908**

IN THE MATTER OF:

Taxpayer.

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**Personal Income Tax
Case No.: 14-T-051**

DECISION

I. INTRODUCTION

The above-entitled matter came before the undersigned as the result of a Notice of Hearing and Appointment of Hearing Officer dated June 11, 2014 and issued to the above-captioned taxpayers ("Taxpayers") by the Division of Taxation ("Division") in response to a request for hearing. The Division was represented by counsel and the Taxpayers (a married couple) were represented by their daughter. The parties agreed that this matter would be decided on an agreed statement of facts and written briefs. After the agreed statement of facts was filed, the parties timely filed their briefs by August 29, 2014 and chose not to file reply briefs.

II. JURISDICTION

The Division has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-1 *et seq.*, R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-1-1 *et seq.*, the *Division of Taxation Administrative Hearing Procedures Regulation AHP 97-01*, and the *Division of Legal Services Regulation 1 Rules of Procedure for Administrative Hearings*.

III. ISSUE

Whether the Taxpayers' request for a refund from a personal income tax return for 2010 is timely pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87.

IV. MATERIAL FACTS

The parties agreed that the Taxpayers were non-residents of Rhode Island in 2010 and had Rhode Island source income for 2010. The parties agreed that the husband (“Husband”) passed away on July 29, 2012. The parties agreed that the Taxpayers filed their 2010 non-resident Rhode Island income tax return on September 3, 2013; though, it was signed on August 25, 2013 and requested a refund of an overpayment of taxes. The parties agreed that the Division denied the Taxpayers’ requested refund as being out-of-time. See Exhibits Two (2) and Three (3).

V. DISCUSSION

A. **Legislative Intent**

The Rhode Island Supreme Court has consistently held that it effectuates legislative intent by examining a statute in its entirety and giving words their plain and ordinary meaning. *In re Falstaff Brewing Corp.*, 637 A.2d 1047 (R.I. 1994). If a statute is clear and unambiguous, “the Court must interpret the statute literally and must give the words of the statute their plain and ordinary meanings.” *Oliveira v. Lombardi*, 794 A.2d 453 (R.I. 2002) (citation omitted). The Supreme Court has also established that it will not interpret legislative enactments in a manner that renders them nugatory or that would produce an unreasonable result. See *Defenders of Animals v. Dept. of Environmental Management*, 553 A.2d 541 (R.I. 1989) (citing *Cocchini v. City of Providence*, 479 A.2d 108 (R.I. 1984)). In cases where a statute may contain ambiguous language, the Rhode Island Supreme Court has consistently held that the legislative intent must be considered. *Providence Journal Co. v. Rodgers*, 711 A.2d 1131 (R.I. 1998). The statutory provisions must be examined in their entirety and the meaning most consistent with the policies and purposes of the legislature must be effectuated. *Id.*

B. Arguments

The Division argued that the statutory provisions preclude the Taxpayers from receiving their requested refund because their request was out-of-time.

The Taxpayers admit that their request was out-of-time. The Taxpayers argued that due to extenuating circumstances, they should receive their refund. The Division did not dispute the terrible losses suffered by the Taxpayers. One of the Taxpayers' daughter was diagnosed with cancer in 2009 and despite various treatments, she passed away and her funeral was on July 28, 2012. During this time period, the Husband (the father) suffered from an aneurism, had surgery in 2012, collapsed the day of his daughter's funeral, and died the next day. The Taxpayers argued that they did not know about the deadline for filing a refund. In light of the devastating losses, the Taxpayers argued that an exception should be made so that the Taxpayers could receive the refund from the Husband's wages.

C. When Refunds are Allowed

R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87 states in part as follows:

Limitations on credit or refund. – (a) *General.* Claim for credit or refund of an overpayment of tax shall be filed by the taxpayer within three (3) years from the time the return was filed or two (2) years from the time the tax was paid, whichever of these periods expires the later, or if no return was filed by the taxpayer, within two (2) years from the time the tax was paid. If the claim is filed within the three (3) year period, the amount of the credit or refund shall not exceed the portion of the tax paid within the three (3) year period. If the claim is not filed within the three (3) year period, but is filed within the two (2) year period, the amount of the credit or refund shall not exceed the portion of the tax paid during the two (2) years immediately preceding the filing of the claim. Except as otherwise provided in this section, if no claim is filed, the amount of a credit or refund shall not exceed the amount which would be allowable if a claim has been filed on the date the credit or refund is allowed.

R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87 provides different time periods within which a refund is allowed. A refund may be claimed within three (3) years of filing a return. If a claim is made

within the three (3) year period, the amount of credit cannot exceed the amount of tax paid within that three (3) year period. A claim may be filed within two (2) years from the time the tax was paid. If a claim is made within the two (2) year period, the amount of refund may not exceed the portion of tax paid during the two (2) years preceding the filing of the claim.

Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87(i),¹ the Taxpayers' tax for 2010 was deemed paid on the date it was due: April 15, 2011. In addition, R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-51² states that Rhode Island personal income tax returns are to be filed by April 15 after the close of the taxable year. R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-52³ states that tax shall be paid on or before the date fixed for filing without regard to an extension. In addition, R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87(e)⁴ specifically precludes

¹ R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87(i) states as follows:

(i) *Prepaid income tax.* For purposes of this section, any income tax withheld from the taxpayer during any calendar year and any amount paid as estimated income tax for a taxable year is deemed to have been paid by the taxpayer on the fifteenth day of the fourth month following the close of his or her taxable year with respect to which the amount constitutes credit or payment.

² R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-51 states in parts as follows:

Returns and liabilities. – (a) *General.* On or before the fifteenth day of the fourth month following the close of a taxable year, a Rhode Island personal income tax return shall be made and filed by or for:

(1) Every resident individual required to file a federal income tax return for the taxable year, or having Rhode Island income for the taxable year, determined under § 44-30-12, in excess of the sum of his federal personal exemptions.

³ R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-52 states in part as follows:

Time and place for filing returns and paying tax. – A person required to make and file a Rhode Island personal income tax return shall, without assessment, notice, or demand, pay any tax due thereon to the tax administrator on or before the date fixed for filing the return, determined without regard to any extension of time for filing the return. The tax administrator shall prescribe the place for filing any return, declaration, statement, or other document and for payment of the tax.

⁴ R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87(e), states as follows:

(e) *Failure to file claim within prescribed period.* No credit or refund shall be allowed or made, except as provided in subsection (f) of this section, after the expiration of the applicable period of limitation unless a claim for credit or refund is filed by the taxpayer within that period or unless the tax administrator determines under subsection (f) of this section that the taxpayer has made an overpayment. Any later credit shall be void and any later refund erroneous. No period of limitations specified in any other law shall apply to the recovery by a taxpayer of moneys paid in respect of Rhode Island personal income tax.

any other period of limitations specified in any other laws from being applied to recovery of personal income tax refunds.

Pursuant to the tenets of statutory construction, a statute must be examined in its entirety and words be given their plain and ordinary meaning. *Infra*. The statute states that the beginning of the three (3) year period is when the return was filed and that the time period is *within* three (3) years from when the return was filed. This unambiguous prospective application is further clarified by the fact that the statute clearly delineates that the two (2) year claim period refers to the period immediately preceding the filing date. Indeed, when reviewing the statute in its entirety and applying the plain meaning of the language, it is clear that the legislature intended to strictly limit the time to claim a refund and amounts of refunds. The legislature could have chosen to make the three (3) year period like the two (2) year period but chose not to. Indeed, it chose instead to strictly limit the time allowed and the amount of refunds claimed.

Thus, applying the State statute results in the following timeline:

1. The Taxpayers' 2010 tax was deemed paid April 15, 2011. The Taxpayers were able to request a refund two (2) years from that date. Any claim for a refund filed in the two (2) year period would be limited to amounts paid in the preceding two (2) years.
2. The Taxpayers filed their 2010 Rhode Island return on September 3, 2013.
3. September 3, 2013 is past the two (2) year period from the date the tax was deemed paid that is allowed for requesting a refund.
4. The statute also allows a claim for a refund to be filed within three (3) years from the date of the return being filed.
5. Thus, the Taxpayers may file a request for a refund within three (3) years of filing of the return.

6. The Taxpayers are within the three (3) year period to claim a refund.
7. The statute specifically limits the amount of a refund for those filed in the three (3) year period to the portion of tax paid "within the three (3) year period" as opposed to those requests filed within the two (2) year period which are limited to tax paid "during the two (2) years immediately preceding the filing of the claim."
8. The Taxpayers have not paid any tax from September 3, 2013 to the present.

In addition, an agency's acquiescence to a continued practice is entitled to great weight in determining legislative intent. R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87 was enacted in 1971 and has not been amended. See *Division's Final Decision* (10/25/85) (denying refund request as untimely under R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87). While the three (3) year period clearly refers to the period from the date of filing, it is a well-recognized principle that a longstanding, practical and plausible interpretation given a statute of doubtful meaning by those responsible for its implementation without any interference by the Legislature should be accepted as evidence that such a construction conforms to the legislative intent. Thus, if it was found that the statute was unclear, Taxation's long standing interpretation is entitled to deference. *Trice v. City of Cranston*, 297 A.2d 649 (R.I. 1972).

While there is no dispute that the Taxpayers suffered terrible losses from the death of their daughter and the Husband, there are no provisions in the statute that provide for any exemptions from the time limits set by statute. The statute has a built-in extension for requesting refunds in that refunds are allowed to be requested either two (2) or three (3) years from the date the tax is deemed paid or the return is filed respectively. Furthermore, while the Taxpayers argued for consideration based on their losses, an administrative proceeding is not an equitable

proceeding and there is no equitable jurisdiction. To find for the Taxpayers on the basis of a fairness argument would be reversible error. *Nickerson v. Reitsma* , 853 A.2d 1202 (R.I. 2004).

Based on the forgoing, the Taxpayers do not qualify for their claimed refund pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87. See *Tax Decision*, 2007-10 (May 10, 2007).

VI. FINDINGS OF FACT

1. On or about June 11, 2014, the Division issued a Notice of Hearing and Appointment of Hearing Officer.
2. The Taxpayers were non-Rhode Island residents in 2010 with Rhode Island source income.
3. The parties agreed that this matter would be decided on agreed facts and written briefs.
4. The Taxpayers' 2010 tax payment was due by April 15, 2011 was deemed paid that day.
5. The Taxpayers filed their 2010 return on September 3, 2013 and claimed a refund for overpayment of tax.
6. There are no Rhode Island statutory or regulatory provisions that provide for any exemptions for any reason from the Rhode Island statute regarding the claiming of late refunds to the filing of Rhode Island tax returns.
7. Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87(a), the Taxpayers are not entitled to the claimed refund.

VII. CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based on the testimony and facts presented:

1. The Division has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-1 *et seq.* and R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-1-1 *et seq.*

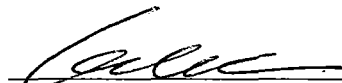
2. Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-40-87(a), the Taxpayers are not entitled to the claimed refund.

VIII. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the above analysis, the Hearing Officer recommends as follows:

Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-87(a), the Taxpayers are not entitled to the claimed refund and the Division properly denied Taxpayers' claim for a refund.

Date: September 9, 2014




Catherine R. Warren
Hearing Officer

ORDER

I have read the Hearing Officer's Decision and Recommendation in this matter, and I hereby take the following action with regard to the Decision and Recommendation:

ADOPT
 REJECT
 MODIFY

Dated: September 16, 2014



David Sullivan
Tax Administrator

NOTICE OF APPELLATE RIGHTS

THIS DECISION CONSTITUTES A FINAL ORDER OF THE DIVISION. THIS ORDER MAY BE APPEALED TO THE SIXTH DIVISION DISTRICT COURT PURSUANT TO R.I. Gen. Laws § 44-30-90 WHICH STATES AS FOLLOWS:

§ 44-30-90 Review of tax administrator's decision.

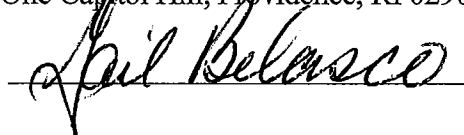
(a) General. Any taxpayer aggrieved by the decision of the tax administrator or his or her designated hearing officer as to his or her Rhode Island personal income tax may within thirty (30) days after notice of the decision is sent to the taxpayer by certified or registered mail, directed to his or her last known address, petition the sixth division of the district court pursuant to chapter 8 of title 8 setting forth the reasons why the decision is alleged to be erroneous and praying relief therefrom. Upon the filing of any complaint, the clerk of the court shall issue a citation, substantially in the form provided in § 44-5-26 to summon the tax administrator to answer the complaint, and the court shall proceed to hear the complaint and to determine the correct amount of the liability as in any other action for money, but the burden of proof shall be as specified in § 8-8-28.

(b) Judicial review sole remedy of taxpayer. The review of a decision of the tax administrator provided by this section shall be the exclusive remedy available to any taxpayer for the judicial determination of the liability of the taxpayer for Rhode Island personal income tax.

(c) Date of finality of tax administrator's decision. A decision of the tax administrator shall become final upon the expiration of the time allowed for petitioning the district court if no timely petition is filed, or upon the final expiration of the time for further judicial review of the case.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that on the 16th day of September, 2014 a copy of the above Decision and Notice of Appellate Rights were sent by first class mail, postage prepaid and return receipt requested to the Taxpayers' representative's address on file with the Division and by hand delivery to Meaghan Kelly, Esquire, Department of Revenue, One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02903.



Neil Belasco