

***2024 Mid-Year Update***

CATA Members and Interested Parties:

**Introduction**

The California Alliance of Taxpayer Advocates (CATA) has had a great track record for over 13 years. We invite you to join us.

As you will recall, CATA was formed in 2011 in response to Senate Bill 341, which sought to prohibit contingency fees in tax disputes. At the time, no organizations represented property tax agents at the state level. CATA organized itself, retained the lobbying firm of Aprea & Company, and with others defeated the measure.

Each and every year since, CATA has worked to successfully promote and protect the interests of property tax agents statewide.

Some of CATA’s highlights include the following:

**CATA Defeated AB 404, a Measure to Require Property Tax Agents to Register as Lobbyists**

In 2012, in the wake of the John Noguez, LA County Pay to Play scandal, Assemblymember Mike Gatto (D-LA) amended AB 404, a measure that would have required property tax agents and their firms to register and report as lobbyists. This would have impacted property tax agents in the Counties of Los Angeles, Orange, San Francisco, Santa Clara, San Diego, and San Mateo. CATA was able to defeat the measure in the Senate on a vote of 13 Aye, 19 No and 8 Not voting.

**CATA Assessor Outreach Program**

In 2015, CATA initiated its County Assessor Outreach Program to improve the property tax assessment and appeals process and to foster better relations between California’s County Assessors and CATA .

**CATA BOE Candidate Outreach Program**

Beginning with the 2014 election cycle, CATA and its Board of Directors identified serious candidates for the State BOE, educated the candidates on the property tax assessment and appeals process, and educated those candidates on the challenges facing property tax agents and their clients.

**CATA Reformed the Use of Section 441 (d) by County Assessors**

In 2017, CATA engaged with California State Board of Equalization (BOE), the California Assessors’ Association (CAA), individual county assessors, state and local elected officials, and other stakeholders to combat the inequities in property tax policies and procedures. Efforts by CATA spurred a statewide debate over county assessor information request letters under Revenue & Taxation Code Section 441(d) and various county assessment appeal practices.

As a result of CATA’s 2017 efforts, in 2018 CATA drafted and led the charge for adoption of taxpayer-friendly amendments to five California Property Tax Rules (Cal. Code of Regs., title 18: Rule 302, The Board’s Function and Jurisdiction; Rule 305, Application; Rule 305.1, Exchange of Information; Rule 305.2, Prehearing Conference; and Rule 323, Postponements and Continuances. These amendments to these Rules were approved by the BOE in late 2018 and became effective on January 1, 2020. The amendments implement, interpret, and make specific Division 1, Part 3, Chapter 1 of the Revenue & Taxation Code by prescribing practices and procedures governing assessment appeals boards when hearing and deciding local property tax

disputes.

CATA’s efforts continued in 2019. Working through the BOE’s interested parties process, CATA provided input for a Section 441(d) form to be used by assessors statewide in order to regularize the processing of information requests issued by county assessors. CATA also helped to edit the SBE’s Assessment Appeals Manual to provide guidance to assessment appeals

boards when granting hearing postponements and continuances.

**CATA Secured the Right for Taxpayers to Choose to Have an In-Person or Virtual Hearing Before an Assessment Appeals Board Hearing**

In 2020 in the midst of the COVID pandemic, the BOE initiated a series of workshops under the banner of “Impact of Public Calamities on Property Tax Administration: County Board of Equalization / AAB Remote Hearings.” The purpose was to evaluate various aspects of property tax administration, hearings, and other processes impacted by public calamities. CATA formed a special committee from its membership to address concerns regarding the implementation of virtual hearings, relevance of virtual hearings versus in-person appearances, and preventing the loss of due process as counties and taxpayers dealt with restrictions arising from public calamities. The outcome of those workshops was the BOE establishing a taxpayer right to choose to have an in-person or a virtual hearing before an Assessment Appeals Board hearing.

CATA also ensured that SB 815, a budget trailer bill enacted in 2020, ensured that property taxpayers are protected by establishing due process safeguards for all parties who participate in remote hearings.

**CATA Defeated Efforts to Eliminate the BOE**

On December 3, 2018, Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian (D-LA) introduced ACA 2. This measure would have abolished the BOE and required the Legislature to create a state tax agency by statute to carry out those powers, duties, and responsibilities previously vested in the BOE by the California Constitution and by statute. ACA 2 was referred to the Assembly Revenue & Taxation Committee, but was not heard. Adrin Nazarian is now a candidate for the Los Angeles City Council.

On March 8, 2023, Assemblymember Phil Ting (D-SF) at the time he was the Chair of the Assembly Budget Committee, introduced ACA 11. The measure sought to place eliminating the State BOE on the 2024 state ballot. In order to do so, the measure needed to be approved by a 2/3 vote of the Legislature by the end of June 2024. This measure sought to abolish the (BOE) effective January 1, 2027. CATA, along with a coalition of BOE Members, legislators, and Cal-Tax ensured that the bill did not have the votes to be approved by the Assembly Revenue & Taxation Committee. The bill was set several times for hearing and withdrawn for lack of sufficient votes.

**Meetings between the CATA Board and the CAA Board**

In December of 2021, the incoming President of the California Assessor’s Association, Kings County Assessor Kristine Lee, spoke at the CATA Conference. In the wake of her presentation, CATA President James DePasquale sought to explore areas where CAA and CATA may work together. As a result, the CATA and CAA Boards have engaged in regular periodic meetings to identify issues of mutual interest such a modernizing the property tax system statewide and providing better data on County Assessor web-sites that is available to taxpayers.

**Annual CATA Property Tax Conference**

Each year since its formation, CATA has hosted a successful annual conference at the Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel. This conference has hosted a wide variety of individuals who impact the property tax system including the following:

* Gubernatorial candidates;
* State BOE candidates;
* Members of the Legislature;
* Key staff to the Governor, members of the Legislature, and the BOE;
* Leadership of the California Assessors Association;
* Individual County Assessors;
* Assessment Appeals Board Members;
* Property Tax Practitioners including property tax agents and attorneys; and
* Proponents and opponents of the various proposed “Split-Roll” Ballot measures.

This year the Conference will be held December 11 – 13, 2024.

**What Happens Next?**

This year the CATA Board of Directors has set forth three priorities for 2024 and onward. They are:

1. Improve the County Assessment Appeals Board scheduling of hearings process statewide;
2. Improve the time in which counties provide refunds to taxpayers following a decision in favor of the taxpayer, e.g. 60 days;
3. Improve the data on County Assessor web-sites information available to taxpayers, comparable to that which is currently available on the LA County Public Access System.

The CATA Board has developed data to support each of these initiatives. In the coming weeks, the CATA Board will approve a plan for achieving each of these initiatives.

We encourage all who have an interest in promoting and protecting the interests of property tax agents in California to join CATA.

Kind regards,

James R. DePasquale, Chair & President

California Alliance of Taxpayer Advocates (CATA)

**CATA is a leading property taxpayer advocacy group in California. If you would like to get involved in CATA’s advocacy efforts, become a member, contribute or if you have questions about any of the topics discussed above, please contact James DePasquale at jdepasquale@dkctax.com.**