## BEFORE THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA OFFICE OF TAX APPEALS COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO

MICHAEL GEARY, ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE

L. FUJII, Appellants.	)	Case No.	19085180
ROBERT WILKINSON and	)		
In the Matter of:	)		

**CERTIFIED COPY** 

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Sacramento, California

Tuesday, October 18, 2022

Reported by:

Maria Esquivel-Parkinson CSR No. 10621, RPR

Job No.: 38957 OTA(A)

1	BEFORE THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
2	OFFICE OF TAX APPEALS
3	COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO
4	MICHAEL GEARY, ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
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6	
7	In the Matter of:
8	ROBERT WILKINSON and ) L. FUJII, )
9	) Case No. 19085180 Appellants. )
10	)
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15	TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS, taken at
16	400 R Street, Sacramento, California,
17	commencing at 1:07 p.m. on Tuesday,
18	October 18, 2022, reported by
19	Maria Esquivel-Parkinson, CSR No. 10621,
20	RPR, a Certified Shorthand Reporter in
21	and for the State of California.
22	
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1	APPEARANCES:
2	
3	PANEL MEMBERS:
4	ALJ ANDREA LONG
5	ALJ SARA HOSEY
6	ALJ TERESA STANLEY
7	
8	FOR THE APPELLANT:
9	PHILLIP JOHNSON
LO	ROBERT WILKINSON
11	
L2	FOR THE FTB:
13	ERIC BROWN, TAX COUNSEL
L4	ERIC YADAO, TAX COUNSEL
15	
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1	SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2022
2	1:07 P.M.
3	
4	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: We will go on
5	the record. Good afternoon. I am Andrea Long, the lead
6	ALJ for this appeal. We are here today for the Appeal
7	of Wilkinson and Fujii, OTA Case No. 19085180. Today is
8	Tuesday, October 18, 2022, and it is 1:07 p.m. This
9	hearing is taking place in Sacramento, California.
10	We will begin with the parties introducing
11	themselves stating their names and who you represent for
12	the record. And let's start with FTB.
13	MR. BROWN: Eric Brown, California Franchise
14	Tax Board.
15	MR. YADAO: Eric Yadao with the Franchise Tax
16	Board.
17	MR. JOHNSON: Phillip Johnson on behalf of
18	Mr. Wilkinson.
19	APPELLANT WILKINSON: Robert Wilkinson, the
20	client or taxpayer.
21	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: Thank you. And
22	with me today on the panel are Judges Sara Hosey and
23	Teresa Stanley. As the lead ALJ for this appeal, I will
24	be conducting the proceedings in this matter, but my
25	co-panelists and I are equal participants. We will all

1	be reviewing the evidence, asking questions, and
2	reaching a determination in this case.
3	The parties have agreed that the issue before
4	today is whether Appellants filed a timely claim for
5	refund for tax years 2011, 2012, and 2013.
6	Appellant submit Exhibits 1 through 5, which
7	are hereby admitted without objection.
8	(Appellant's Exhibits 1 through 5 admitted.)
9	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: And FTB submits
10	Exhibits A through M and Exhibits O through S, which are
11	hereby admitted without objection.
12	(FTB's Exhibits A through M and O through S
13	admitted.)
14	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: And the parties
15	indicated there are no other evidence to submit into the
16	record.
17	So we will begin with each party's
18	presentations.
19	Mr. Johnson, you'll have 20 minutes to make
20	your presentation and Mr. Wilkinson to provide
21	testimony. And so I will swear Mr. Wilkinson in at this
22	
<b>4 4</b>	time.
23	time.  So, Mr. Wilkinson, can you please raise your

Do you swear to affirm -- swear or affirm that

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the testimony you give today is the truth, the whole
truth, and nothing but the truth?

APPELLANT WILKINSON: Yes, I do.

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: Thank you. And Mr. Johnson and Mr. Wilkinson, you may begin.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you.

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## OPENING STATEMENT

BY MR. JOHNSON, Representative for Taxpayer:

Robert Wilkinson is a senior citizen who is being penalized by the State of California for paying too much in taxes. Mr. Wilkinson has an unblemished record of timely filing and paying his California state taxes each year over several decades.

When a situation presented itself with which Mr. Wilkinson was unfamiliar, he contacted the Franchise Tax Board to receive supposedly correct information. When he inquired from the experts at the FTB, he was told that he must pay a California tax on his social security payments. Unfortunately, this advice was proved erroneously only after seven subsequent years of timely filing his taxes, and the Franchise Tax Board failed to catch this obvious error for seven consecutive years.

The State will argue that there is no record of

this conversation. Whether true or not, there are a variety of reasons that a record might not exist: It was inadvertently deleted, the agent did not make an adequate record, it was destroyed in the ordinary course of business, or an error was made by the agent.

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Indeed, we point to the discrepancy between the two FTB agents both of whom went through training for their roles. One states that all records were destroyed; whereas another states that all records were reviewed from 2006 and that the information was not found.

In determining which scenario was more likely, on the one hand a taxpayer who has consistently paid his taxes over the course of several decades and who sought professional assistance when he encountered a situation with which he was not familiar in contrast to the FTB whose own agents provide conflicting advice and disagree as to a major element of conducting business, the normal records retentions policy.

Likewise, within the declaration of Leslie

Yorston provided to show a lack of error, there contains
an error. In paragraph two she writes, "Like all other
call center technicians, I received, I, a minimum of six
weeks of training." The fact is errors exist.

Unfortunately, the Franchise Tax Board itself

does not stand behind its own errors. Instead it offers a pithy disclaimer stating that the taxpayer should not rely on the advice of their trained phone agents.

In my prior role, I was a stockbroker and I took trades over the telephone every day. Frequently I would be required to provide advice about trading equities, derivatives, special purpose vehicles, and fixed income.

Based upon this advice, the client determined whether or not to proceed on their course of action. If at any time I provided erroneous information in the course of my trading on behalf of the client, the client would be made whole effectively disgorging the client from any fees, penalties, and costs associated with the erroneous action. I, too, could face consequences up to and including termination.

In contrast, the Tax Board when faced with a similar situation, chooses to respond with, "Well, you shouldn't rely on our phone advice."

Indeed, if we as taxpayers are unable to rely on the advice provided by the Franchise Tax Board when we seek their assistance, the taxpayer dollars spent on what has been characterized as the extensive training, employment, and technology of their staff could certainly be spent elsewhere to greater effect.

Mr. Wilkinson is not a tax professional. He is, however, a consistent and timely taxpayer. As such, it was reasonable for him to obtain professional advice in order to effectively perform his tax duties not realizing that the Franchise Tax Board will not stand behind their own agents.

As a result, Mr. Wilkinson overpaid his taxes, and now he's unable to retrieve his own funds as a result of the statute of limitations. Despite the unfairness of this, there's a reasonable legal remedy for Mr. Wilkinson found in the doctrine of equitable estoppel where a party, Mr. Wilkinson in this case, reasonably relied on the representations of another, being the FTB, and consequently suffered detrimentally.

Now, as you know, there are four elements that must be met to apply equitable estoppel. The estopped party, being the FTB, must be advised on the facts.

That party must intend that its conduct be acted upon by the taxpayer or that -- or that the party claiming estoppel, Mr. Wilkinson, had a right to believe it was intended. Party claiming estoppel must be ignorant of the true facts, and the party claiming estoppel must show that detrimental or reliance.

Mr. Wilkinson has met each of these elements.
Mr. Wilkinson contacted the FTB to inquire whether his

social security was to be taxed, he was advised that it is taxable, and he relied on these facts. That element is met.

Mr. Wilkinson called the FTB with a reasonable belief that he would receive accurate advice from the expert, and there's no record that he was advised that their information was likely wrong. As a direct result, he reasonably assumed the advice was correct. That element is met.

Mr. Wilkinson was unaware of the facts and he took the action to contact the FTB from an expensive overseas call relay in order to receive direction in a timely manner. Likewise, he continued to pay his taxes in that same timely manner for several years, each year paying tax on his social security income clearly ignorant of the facts. That element is met.

Finally, detrimental reliance is shown by the fact that Mr. Wilkinson overpaid his taxes for several years by mistakenly including his social security income when that money could have been used by him elsewhere.

Now, FTB will argue that all prongs have not been satisfied. By FTB's own account, the doctrine of equitable estoppel will be applied against a government agency such as the FTB only when all of the elements of estoppel are conclusively present and when application

of estoppel is necessary to prevent manifest injustice.

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Now, first, let's look at manifest injustice.

It occurs when the outcome of a case is plainly and obviously unjust. Depriving a senior citizen of his income as a result of overpayment he understood to be required and then withholding the rightful recompense is manifestly unjust.

Indeed, 368(a) of the Penal Code states that "The Legislature finds and declares that elder adults, whose physical or mental disabilities or other limitations restrict their ability to carry out normal activities or to protect their rights deserve special consideration and protection."

Manifest injustice also occurs when Mr. Wilkinson's error in paying too much tax was not recognized for seven consecutive years despite having Mr. Wilkinson's 1099 SSA on file. We are asking that the FTB be equitably estopped.

In Cruise versus City and County of San

Francisco, the Court of Appeals said, "Whether an
estoppel exists against the government should be tested
generally by the same rules as those applicable to
private persons. The government should not be permitted
to avoid liability by tactics that would never be
countenance between private parties. The government

should be an example to its citizens, and by that is meant a good example and not a bad one."

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Don't punish Mr. Wilkinson for the failures of the Franchise Tax Board: Failure to provide accurate advice, failure to notify Mr. Wilkinson of his overpayment of taxes over the course of seven years, and failure to effectively refund all monies he spent as a result of this faulty information that they won't stand behind. Thank you.

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: Thank you. Thank you. Do you want to have Mr. Wilkinson provide his testimony at this time?

APPELLANT WILKINSON: Microphone working?

Okay. I am not a lawyer, so I do not know what's okay to say in this hearing, but I was an electrical engineering project manager with a master's degree for jobs up to \$10 million. And the two documents that are being referred to by -- for the Franchise Tax Board, which I will mention and have them in my hand really bother me.

If I had received a similar set of conflicting documents at work and I was responsible for dealing with a lot of money from a contractor, subcontractor, combination, I would have sent them immediately to the legal department as I would believe there was a serious

legal problem with the contractor and maybe the contractor should be terminated from employment with the government.

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The two documents I want to give to the judge, which I think you already have, are a cut-and-paste of the Franchise Tax Board brief that said they have a full record of all phone calls back to 2006, and they have details on each call as the person taking the call was supposed to take notes.

The second document, which is a letter, says that all phone records from 2006 to after my claim period, that's -- which is 2014. And by the way, the Franchise Tax Board did pay three of the years. They did own -- I mean four of the years because they were -- they accepted them -- were destroyed as part of the normal process of the Franchise Tax Board. Both items were signed under oath.

I feel there is something very wrong in this situation, and I want the conflict put in the hearing record. I believe one of the two agents committed a felony. And a felony should lead to termination of employment.

Note I would be the -- okay. And when I did the actual contact with the Franchise Tax Board, I was in Greece, not in Berkeley, and I -- this was a day

before you had international cell phones you just grab and called anywhere. And I didn't have a cell phone, so I had to go to a phone office run by the local phone company and call to ask this -- about this question about the social security.

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Now, the first item is from the Franchise Tax Board brief, which states that -- well, like I said, that they have all the records. It's in front of me, and I think you have copies of it or I can give you a copy.

The second is from a letter from December 18th, 2020, from a M-a-u-r-e-e-n O-j-e-d-a, disclosure specialist, that says "All phone conversations were destroyed under normal purging of such items." So this is direct conflict.

Now, the next one I want to bring up is supposing I'd made a different kind of mistake. Supposing I took three dependents where it says dependents but I only deducted two as money. So they're like, say, \$200 each, I deduct 400 instead of 600. Or if I did it the other way around, I took two and deducted 600. I strongly believe if I had done the second one and had put in two and deducted for three, the Franchise Tax Board would have sent me a letter that you made a mistake; however, if I took three dependents

and only took two, would the Franchise Tax Board be bothered to send me a letter that said, "Oh, you can take one more deduction"? So I think that should be considered.

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Now, finally, on the S-e-r-m-e page of the Franchise Tax Board website, it identifies the principles of the Franchise Tax Board to carry out their fiduciary responsibility to taxpayers by maintaining their accounts with accuracy and financial integrity. Α fiduciary duty is one of the most serious responsibilities a person or agency can take upon themselves. A fiduciary is legally bound to put their client's best interest ahead of their own. Franchise -- the fiduciary duties appear in a range of business relation, and in the law in each of these areas -- half of the person -- sorry -- in each of these areas taking fiduciary responsibilities to act on behalf of another person putting the other's interests ahead of their own with a duty to preserve good faith and trust -- very important -- good faith and trust with taxpayers. How does not being able to rely on the advice of an oral conversation with a Franchise Tax Board agent instill good faith and trust? rationale is used to establish a fiduciary relationship but not have any actual responsibilities in the

relationship?

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So I see my relation as a taxpayer to the Franchise Tax Board as a contract, like in my jobs as a project manager. There should be a level playing field. It should not be David and Goliath. I feel I'm David, and the Franchise Tax Board is Goliath. They can bring in lawyers making \$200,000 a year against me.

Now, if I made the same mistake for seven years in a row and this mistake was never supposed to be allowed, it seems that it's very strange that it was never caught. Of course, it was to be the advantage of the Franchise Tax Board.

Now, when you look at the 540 form, there's a serious error in how it's set up. Since social security is always, and I repeat, always deducted, the form should simply have had a little red mark or note that you deducted -- you can put the number in like 10,000 and then deduct it and it should actually give you an advice, which I've seen on other parts of the form they put little notes on it. And there's no advice to say "deducted." What if there had been a note, I would have deducted it. That -- and that is what I -- all I need to say. Thank you.

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: Thank you. FTB, do you have questions of the taxpayer?

1	MR. BROWN: No.
2	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: And, Judge
3	Hosey, do you have any questions for the taxpayer?
4	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE HOSEY: No questions
5	at this time. Thank you.
6	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: And Judge
7	Stanley?
8	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE STANLEY: No
9	questions. Thank you.
10	APPELLANT WILKINSON: Do you need copies of
11	these documents from the Franchise Tax Board, or do you
12	have copies of both the Franchise Tax Board brief and
13	the letter signed by Maureen O-j-a-d-a. Sorry. I don't
14	know how to pronounce her name. Do you have these
15	letters?
16	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: We have the
17	briefings by both parties.
18	FTB, do you have a reference of what
19	Mr. Wilkinson is talking about?
20	MR. BROWN: Yes. In fact, that's Exhibit S,
21	and we have a cover letter for that Exhibit S that I'll
22	be talking about.
23	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: All right.
24	Yes, we do have it then.
25	APPELLANT WILKINSON: Okay. So you have all

1 I do not have to give you anything. the documents. 2 ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: Correct. 3 APPELLANT WILKINSON: That's fine. Thank you. 4 ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: Thank you. 5 All right. FTB, you may begin your 6 presentation. 7 OPENING STATEMENT 8 9 BY MR. BROWN, FTB Counsel: 10 Good afternoon. I'm Eric Brown, tax counsel with the Franchise Tax Board. 11 The issue is whether Appellants filed their claims for refund for tax years 12 13 2011, 2012, and 2013 within the statute of limitations. 14 The facts are undisputed. Appellants filed their claims 15 for refund consisting of amended tax returns for tax years 2011 through 2017 on March 15, 2019. 16 17 The basis for Appellants' claims for refund for 18 each year was their failure to deduct social security 19 income from their California tax liability. FTB 20 refunded Appellants' claims for tax years 2014 through 21 2017. FTB denied Appellants' claims for refund for tax 22 years 2011 through 2013 because those years were beyond

Appellants do not argue that they filed their claims for refund within the four-year or one-year

the statutes of limitations.

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statute of limitations period but argue that the FTB should be equitably estopped from claiming Appellants' claims are time barred by the statute of limitations.

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Appellants claim that in an undated telephone conversation between Appellant Mr. Wilkinson and FTB, that FTB's representative told Mr. Wilkinson that social security income was not deductible, or words to that effect.

Appellants argue they detrimentally relied on the representation by not filing a claim for refund for the tax years in question. Appellants claim that sometime in 2018 they discovered social security income was deductible for California purposes, and so they filed their claims for refund for all years.

Even if we accept as true Appellants' contention that a conversation took place exactly as Appellants claim, there is no equitable estoppel. It is well-settled that tax liability must be based on the law as set forth in the Revenue and Taxation Code and not upon oral statements of FTB. It is also well-settled that reliance on informal opinions offered by an FTB employee is not sufficient to create estoppel against the FTB.

We cited those points in our brief and they are in the opening brief. For each year, FTB's instruction

booklet made it clear that social security income is deductible for California purposes. In claiming they've relied on a representation from an FTB representative in a single conversation, Appellants admit that for every year after 2011 they failed to review the instruction booklet regarding social security income deductibility.

2.4

Appellants have provided no details about the telephone conversation with an FTB representative. They've not indicated when the conversation took place, the identity of the FTB representative, the context of the conversation, what subjects were discussed, or any other details. All Appellants provide is that they believe the conversation involved the 2011 tax year when they were outside the United States. FTB has no record of a telephone conversation as Appellants allege.

FTB provides the declaration of Leslie Yorston, someone with the knowledge of FTB call center training and procedures who is familiar with the job duties of FTB call center technicians and the importance of making notes of telephone calls, including the content and subjects discussed.

Ms. Yorston declared that if the subject of deductibility of social security income had been discussed during a conversation with a taxpayer, it would have been a topic an FTB call center technician

would have been trained to notate.

2.4

Ms. Yorston reviewed all notes of telephone conversations between Appellants and FTB and found no notations of conversations prior to March 2019 in which social security income was even discussed.

In view of the lack of details of the telephone conversation on the one hand and FTB's procedures and importance placed on ensuring conversations with taxpayers involving important tax topics are notated on the other hand, it is more likely that a conversation involving deductibility of social security income did not take place then that the conversation did take place as Appellants recall.

There seems to be some confusion about the letter that was the cover letter from the disclosure department regarding destruction of records, or words to that effect. In fact, we called the disclosure department to clarify that point, and we indicated in our cover letter that that pertained only to audio recordings of telephone calls if, in fact, they ever existed. But insofar as the written records, the written notations of the telephone conversations as contemporaneously written by the call technicians, they are all present. There's no indication that any of those have been deleted or destroyed or anything to that

1 effect.

I believe my colleague has perhaps some comments other than that. That's my -- I concluded.

## OPENING STATEMENT

6 BY MR. YADAO, FTB Counsel:

Hi. Eric Yadao, Franchise Tax Board. I'd just like to touch on the law as cited by the appellants in their pleading which was dated November 24th, 2020. They cite to the Appeal of Richard R. and Diane K. Smith and the Appeal at Western Colorprint. And it is instructive because it talks a little more about what is required under the law to establish estoppel.

And the first two elements, the government agency must be shown to have been aware of the actual facts. The government agency must be shown to have made an incorrect or inaccurate representation.

And the evidence that we put before you, which is a complete call log contemporaneous before the tax years happen, they go back to -- if you look at Exhibit S, page 12 of 12, we have call records back as far as 2008 and moving forward.

And I believe also in their pleading the appellant indicated the call might have happened between February 2012 and April 2012, which was the filing

1	season for 2011. And you'll see page 12 of 12, there's
2	no indication of phone calls in that time frame or
3	discussing social security income, the deductibility of
4	it. So elements one and two have not been met to
5	establish estoppel. They have not shown by a
6	preponderance of any evidence that FTB was aware of the
7	actual facts or that FTB gave that advice. Thank you.
8	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: Is that all for
9	FTB?
10	MR. BROWN: I have nothing further.
11	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: Okay. I will
12	turn to my panel members.
13	Judge Hosey, do you have any questions?
14	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE HOSEY: No questions
15	at this time. Thank you.
16	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: Judge Stanley,
17	any questions?
18	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE STANLEY: No
19	questions. Thank you.
20	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: Thank you.
21	We will give Appellants five additional minutes
22	if they want to address any arguments that FTB made or
23	final comments before we conclude the hearing.
24	APPELLANT WILKINSON: Just that well, no, I
25	already covered it.

1	MR. JOHNSON: That's all. Thank you.
2	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE LONG: That's all?
3	Okay. Well, then that concludes the hearing for today.
4	The panel will meet and decide this appeal based on the
5	briefings, the arguments presented, and the exhibits
6	admitted into evidence, and then we will send both
7	parties our written opinion in about 100 days from
8	today. Thank you for your participation today. The
9	hearing is now the case is now submitted and the
10	record is closed.
11	(Conclusion of the proceedings)
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1	REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE
2	STATE OF CALIFORNIA )
3	) ss. COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO )
4	I, MARIA ESQUIVEL-PARKINSON, do hereby certify
5	that I am a Certified Shorthand Reporter, and that at
6	the times and places shown I recorded verbatim in
7	shorthand writing all the proceedings in the following
8	described action completely and correctly to the best of
9	my ability:
10	LOCATION: OFFICE OF TAX APPEALS
11	400 R STREET Sacramento, CA 95811
12	CASE: In the Matter of the Appeal of:
13	Robert Wilkinson and L. Fujii
14	DATE: Tuesday, October 18, 2022
15	I further certify that my said shorthand notes have been transcribed into typewriting, and that the foregoing 25 pages constitute an accurate and complete
16	transcript of all my shorthand writing for the dates and matter specified.
17	
18	I further certify that I have complied with CCP 237(a)(2) in that all personal juror identifying information has been redacted if applicable.
19	
20	IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have subscribed this certificate at Sacramento, California on this 7th day of November, 2022.
21	
22	- Mairas Du
23	Maria Esquivel-Parkinson CSR No. 10621, RPR
24	

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