
Tax errors may cost Nassau residents; [NASSAU AND SUFFOLK Edition]

MICHAEL ROTHFELD. STAFF WRITER. Newsday. (Combined editions). Long Island, N.Y.: Nov 17, 2004. pg. A.47

Abstract (Document Summary)

In another tax controversy, Hempstead Tax Receiver Donald Clavin yesterday blasted county officials over two instances of clerical errors that took away exemptions that reduce school tax bills for homeowners. Clavin said the errors could take up to a year to fix.

Clavin yesterday appeared at a news conference in Mineola with, [Ronald Stenzler] and Marilyn Stenzler, a Levittown couple who, because of a data processing error, lost the school tax exemption that saved them \$1,317.19 last year. "It's the taxpayers' money, and they shouldn't have to wait for it because of this county snafu," Clavin said, calling on Nassau to streamline the process and conduct an audit.

Randolph Yunker, a spokesman for Assessor Harvey Levinson, said Levinson spoke with Clavin last week, and the matter never came up. Yunker said Levinson is fixing the errors. "He feels it's unfortunate that we're conducting government through press conferences now," Yunker said.

Full Text (549 words)

(Copyright Newsday Inc., 2004)

A rash of mistakes on school tax bills mailed out across Nassau County last month was roiling town, county and school district officials yesterday.

The controversy extended from Bellmore, where property owners will have to reach a little deeper into their wallets because of an error by school district officials, to Mineola, where the Hempstead tax receiver called the county assessor to account because two residents improperly lost tax exemptions.

The problems in Bellmore started in August. When the school district sent the amount of its tax levy to the Nassau County Department of Assessment, it requested \$32.8 million instead of the \$33.9 million that was actually needed, leaving the district \$1.1 million short.

"It is purely a clerical error, and it isn't something that's systemic," Superintendent Sheldon Dumain said yesterday, adding that voters approved the higher amount in passing the district's budget.

Because of the mistake, residents are going to have to cough up \$208 more on average than the bills they got in the mail. A decision has not yet been made as to when the amended bills will be sent out. Based on the incorrect levy, the average tax bill was calculated at \$6,081. The new average bill is \$6,289.

"I'm sure it's going to be quite disturbing to many of the people that are living in the community that are already paying enormous taxes," said Paule Pachter, a member of Bellmore-Merrick Parents for Change.

Bellmore's school board president, Jay L.T. Breakstone, said he would not discuss the matter outside of a board meeting except to say, "The mistake is a clerical error, and it's been discovered and it's in the process of being rectified."

Dumain said the mistake occurred when Richard Snyder, the assistant superintendent for business and technology, misread a spreadsheet and sent the wrong number to the county.

He said the district had sent a request for an amended levy to the assessment department. It needs approval by the assessment board and the county legislature.

In another tax controversy, Hempstead Tax Receiver Donald Clavin yesterday blasted county officials over two instances of clerical errors that took away exemptions that reduce school tax bills for homeowners. Clavin said

the errors could take up to a year to fix.

Clavin yesterday appeared at a news conference in Mineola with, Ronald and Marilyn Stenzler, a Levittown couple who, because of a data processing error, lost the school tax exemption that saved them \$1,317.19 last year. "It's the taxpayers' money, and they shouldn't have to wait for it because of this county snafu," Clavin said, calling on Nassau to streamline the process and conduct an audit.

The Stenzlers said they were strapped for money because Ronald Stenzler, 49, had been through a bout with cancer three years ago and was unemployed for a time.

"We're still trying to get out of a hole," he said.

Clavin also displayed the tax bill of Hillary Wertlieb of Atlantic Beach, who lost an exemption that saved her \$711 last year.

Randolph Yunker, a spokesman for Assessor Harvey Levinson, said Levinson spoke with Clavin last week, and the matter never came up. Yunker said Levinson is fixing the errors. "He feels it's unfortunate that we're conducting government through press conferences now," Yunker said.

Staff writer Joseph Mallia contributed to this story.