

February 2022

Interview with Mireille Eastman, Massachusetts Taxpayer Advocate

1. Tell us about yourself and your professional background.

I started at the Department of Revenue (DOR) as an intern in 2004 when I was in my third year at Boston University School of Law. After graduation I worked in the Litigation Bureau for seven years, where I worked on many kinds of disputes; from small dollar penalty cases to some of DOR's most complicated corporate tax cases. I have always had an interest in tax policy, so I moved to the Rulings and Regulations Bureau where for ten years I was involved in the drafting and development of various regulations and other public written statements, participated in various working groups, and provided guidance to internal and external stakeholders. Before law school I spent a few years pursuing an acting career in NYC and working in fine dining restaurants. Working in a high volume, fine dining restaurant is one of the best environments to learn about customer service and managing multiple tasks quickly and efficiently.



2. Why were you interested in the Taxpayer Advocate position and what prompted you to apply?

Throughout my time in both Litigation and Rulings and Regulations I have been drawn to working on new initiatives and intradepartmental working groups. I developed working relationships with managers throughout DOR and I have been consistently impressed with the levels of insight and dedication of my colleagues. When I found out that Dana Ackerman was retiring, I felt that it would be a great role for me due to my experience in dispute resolution, my knowledge of tax policy and my understanding of the inner workings of DOR. I also look forward to working more directly with taxpayers in this new role.

3. How do you see the role of Taxpayer Advocate?

One of the aspects of government work that greatly appeals to me is the fact that we are acting on behalf of the entire Commonwealth of Massachusetts, so our view cannot be confined to a single matter or perspective. The Taxpayer Advocate's primary responsibility is to identify and propose solutions and changes for systemic problems that increase the burden on or create issues for taxpayers. Where appropriate, the Advocate will recommend administrative changes to resolve or mitigate these problems. As someone who litigated cases and worked with taxpayers to settle cases, I am keenly aware of the burdens and frustrations that arise when systemic issues are not resolved proactively. Furthermore, as someone who has been involved in tax policy development, I understand that taking a proactive approach in the development of our policies, and how we

administer and communicate those policies, can benefit all parties. In my new role I hope to marry my legal knowledge, my advocacy skills, and my passion for serving the people of the Commonwealth.

4. What are your short- and long-term goals and initiatives for your new position?

Given the fact that it's mid-February my short-term goal is to have a great filing season! My role is to support the massive effort DOR undertakes every year to process millions of tax returns, payments, and refunds. Beyond that I am already working on building connections with groups like yours that advocate on behalf of taxpayers and tax professionals. I am focused on making sure that we communicate tax law changes, systems issues, and new initiatives via our website or more direct targeted forms of communication. I am also always on the lookout for ways to improve our operations to reduce, or dare I say avoid, any pain points.

5. As Taxpayer Advocate, how do you anticipate working with the MassCPAs and our membership?

I value the relationship that already exists between DOR and the MassCPA. I have attended the annual tax conference for many years and have found it to be a great forum for information sharing and relationship building. I hope to work in partnership with MassCPA in communicating information to your membership. I am also interested in getting feedback on what issues are important to taxpayers in Massachusetts.

6. How can MassCPAs and our membership best assist you in this role?

Keep sending us emails about questions and issues as they arise. We do our best to keep our website updated, but sometimes changes come quickly, so if there is a discrepancy or error, or an important topic impacting the community that we have not addressed, we are grateful for the feedback. We recommend that the membership use the great resources on our website; like the ["What's Trending?"](#) page, where we post information about recent changes and new initiatives, the [Current Filing Season Overview](#) page, where we have a video and other relevant information related to the TY21 filing season, the [information for tax professionals](#) page, with many useful links, and a page called ["DOR Hot Topics for Tax Professionals"](#) where you can find timely updates on important issues. Last but not least, I am excited to work with Amy Pitter on the DOR Advisory Council, which offers another opportunity to collaborate on DOR's important initiatives to better serve the needs of Massachusetts taxpayers.

7. What's the last TV show you binge watched?

I'm a total Star Wars nerd, so I've been watching the Mandalorian and more recently The Book of Boba Fett. But when I'm waiting for the next episode, I love to revisit the Rose family on Schitt's Creek.

