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January 23, 1991

CINDY RAMBO  
Executive Director

No. 91/08  
CORRECTION

TO COUNTY ASSESSORS:

CHANGE IN OWNERSHIP CONSEQUENCES OF REAL PROPERTY  
IN AN ESTATE OR TRUST  
DISTRIBUTED ON A "SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE" BASIS

This letter sets forth the change in ownership consequences of transfers of property from parents to children when property is distributed according to a will or trust and the language of the document directs that the assets of the estate or trust be distributed to the children on a "share and share alike" basis.

Currently, when an estate or trust is to be distributed on a share and share alike basis many assessors presume, for property tax purposes, that the beneficiaries of a trust or the heirs of a will have an equal interest in each and every property owned by the decedent. Consequently, in these counties a change in ownership occurs if any heir or beneficiary obtains an interest in any real property greater than his/her proportional interest in the estate or trust. For example, if property is left to four children and one child is granted a 100 percent interest in the parent's residence, the assessor would have determined that 75 percent of the property interests transferred. Using this policy, the percentage of interests transferred is the amount that the interest in the real property exceeds the proportional interest in the estate.

Our recommendations for the change in ownership consequences of property distributed on a share and share alike basis depend on the provisions of the trust instrument or the will.

TRUSTS

The key to whether a change in ownership occurs when property is distributed according to a trust on a share and share alike basis is whether the trust instrument limits the trustee's powers to distribute property.

Probate Code Section 16200 provides, in part, that a trustee has not only the powers conferred by the trust instrument but also, except as limited in the trust instrument, the powers conferred by statute. Following Probate Code Section 16200 are a number of provisions conferring express statutory powers on trustees. Among those provisions is Section 16246 which provides:

"The trustee has the power to effect distribution of property and money in divided or undivided interests and to adjust resulting differences in valuation. A distribution in kind may be made pro rata or non-pro rata." (Added by Chapter 820 of the Statutes of 1986.)

The statement "a distribution in kind may be made pro rata or non-pro rata," means that the trustee has a choice in how he/she distributes non-cash assets, such as real property. The trustee can either give the beneficiaries common ownership in all the assets of the trust estate (pro rata) or can allocate specific assets to individual beneficiaries (non-pro rata).

California trust law recognizes that the administration of a trust is governed by the trust instrument. Union Bank and Trust Co. v. McColgan (1948) 84 Cal. App. 2d 208. Thus, where the trust instrument conflicts with statutory power, the instrument controls unless a court, pursuant to Probate Code Section 1620.1, relieves the trustee of the restriction in the instrument. Absent a restriction in the trust instrument, the trustee enjoys both the powers conferred by the trust instrument and those conferred by the provisions of the Probate Code, including Section 16246.

Unless the trust instrument specifically states otherwise, the trustee has the power to distribute the trust assets in kind on either a pro rata or non-pro rata basis. Consequently, property in a trust, where the trustee has the power to distribute trust assets on a share and share alike basis can be treated as a direct transfer from parent to child to the extent that the value of the property does not exceed the value of the stipulated share of trust assets. This is because both statutory and case law recognize that, unless the trust instrument specifically states how the beneficiaries are to share the trust's assets, the trustee has the power to distribute property as he/she wishes. Accordingly, the assessor should recognize these transfers of property as a parent to child transfer, which may qualify for the parent/child exclusion under Section 63.1.

#### Example:

A parent leaves a trust estate with a net worth of \$500,000 to his four children on a share and share alike basis. Each child is to receive \$125,000 net worth of assets. The trust document does not limit the trustee's power to distribute the trust assets. Accordingly, as provided by Probate Code Section 16246, the trustee has the power to distribute sole ownership of any asset or a fractional interest in any asset to any of the children.

In distributing the trust, the trustee decides to deed the principal residence, worth \$112,500 and no outstanding loans, to one child. In our view, this would be considered a 100 percent transfer from parent to child which may be excluded from change in ownership under Section 63.1 if a proper claim form is filed. This is because the net worth of the property is under the child's \$125,000 share in the estate. If the property had a net worth which was more than \$125,000, a partial change in ownership

would have occurred. The following example outlines the procedures for such a situation.

If the trustee deeds another child an investment property, with a market value of \$225,000 and an outstanding mortgage balance of \$50,000 (encumbrances in the property should be considered), then a 28.57 percent reappraisable change in ownership would occur. This is calculated as follows: equity in the property minus child's share of the trust estate divided by the equity in the property (\$175,000 - \$125,000/\$175,000). In this case, the equity in the property that the child receives exceeds his/her proportional share of the trust estate by 28.57 percent. In effect, this 28.57 percent interest in the property is a transfer of property between siblings. It does not qualify as a transfer from parent to child since it exceeds the direction that the children share and share alike. Therefore, a 28.57 percent change in ownership of the property has occurred while the remaining 71.43 percent may be excluded from change in ownership according to the provisions of Section 63.1 of the Revenue and Taxation Code.

In practice, assuming a 1975 factored base year value of \$75,000, the new base year value of the property would be calculated as follows:

1975	Factored base year value	\$ 75,000 x 71.43% = \$ 53,572
1990	Market value	\$225,000 x 28.57% = <u>64,282</u>
	Value to be enrolled for current roll	\$117,854

### WILLS

Whether a change in ownership occurs when a child receives a 100 percent interest in real property from a parent's estate when the estate is distributed according to a will on a share and share alike basis depends on whether the will gives the executor a clear grant of broad discretion to distribute property in kind on a pro rata or non-pro rata basis.

Under the Probate Code provisions applicable to wills, the general rule is that a devise of property to more than one person vests the property in them as owners in common. Probate Code Section 6143 provides that unless a contrary intention is indicated in the will, "a devise of property to more than one person vests the property in them as owners in common." See also Estate of Pence (1931) 117 Cal. App. 323, at 331, holding that a devise to more than one person to share and share alike indicates a gift in common. See also Noble v. Beach (1942) 21 Cal. 2d 91, 94; and Estate of Russell (1968) 69 Cal. 2d 200, 214-215.

Of course, many wills contain provisions which grant discretion to distribute property in kind on a pro rata or non-pro rata basis or something equivalent. Probate Code Section 6140(a) states that the intention of the testator as expressed in the will controls the legal effect of the dispositions made in the will. In light of this general principle, a clear grant of discretion to distribute the property in kind on a pro rata or non-pro

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rata basis must be given due recognition. In the absence of such a clear grant of broad discretion in the will, however, or an appropriate judicial determination of the meaning of the provisions of the will, assessors are entitled to rely on the general rule set forth in Section 6143 of the Probate Code.

Therefore, if it is determined that the will clearly grants the executor broad discretion in distributing property in kind on a pro rata or non-pro rata basis, the change in ownership consequences are identical to those in the example illustrated for trusts above. If it is not certain or it has not been proved that the executor has this power, then the assessor is correct in allocating an equal fractional interest in each and every property owned by the parent to each child for property tax purposes. It follows that a partial change in ownership will occur if any child acquires an interest in any real property owned by the parent greater than the proportional interest in the estate. It is important to note that the taxpayer carries the burden of proving, to the assessor's satisfaction, that the will in fact grants the requisite discretionary power in distributing the property.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact our Real Property Technical Services Unit at (916) 445-4982.

Sincerely,



Verne Walton, Chief  
Assessment Standards Division

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