

From: Corbett Webb, Associate Director for the MD State Dept. of Assessments & Taxation
Re: Preliminary Job Search for the New Position of State Tax Sale Ombudsman
Date: September 24, 2019
To: Interested Applicants

As many of you know, due to [Chapter 730](#) of the General Assembly's 2019 laws, SDAT has been directed to create a new Office of the State Tax Sale Ombudsman. This is not only an entirely new function for the Department, but is an entirely new venture for state government—providing a centralized state office for assisting with tax sale issues and related reporting. Although the parameters of this new office are still to be determined, it is clear what needs to happen first—hire a State Tax Sale Ombudsman!

This is truly a unique position, and the right person will have the opportunity to be actively involved in developing a program from scratch and ensuring its success for years to come. This person will also have the opportunity to be part of SDAT's leadership team and be involved with the implementation of a number of other exciting initiatives—most notably a customer service center. If you know someone who is a self-starter and passionate about public service, this is a tremendous opportunity for them to do some good and work with a great team. Feel free to pass this on to whoever you wish, but note that it is not a typical skilled services hiring process and we will begin interviewing on a rolling basis as soon as possible.

About the Job Responsibilities:

When a homeowner reaches a certain point of delinquency in their property tax payments, counties and Baltimore City can send them into tax sale. Although the process varies by county and property type, after the sale of the home the homeowner generally gets six months to redeem the home. Although this is not indicative of every tax sale, I was recently on an email thread where a homeowner could redeem their home for \$600, and by encouraging them to apply for the homeowners' tax credit we were able to provide them \$400 towards that redemption.

The difficult and exciting part about this position is that our Department is not currently an expert on tax sales—in fact no one in state government is. Every county currently has its own process and some counties are more transparent than others. The main responsibility of the Tax Sale Ombudsman is to develop a county-specific packet detailing that county's tax sale process, and information on possible relief that may be available to homeowners. These relief programs include state programs available for everyone (ie. the homeowners' tax credit), but also county specific programs that the homeowner may not know about. After the initial packet is compiled, hopefully the Tax Sale Ombudsman can develop a network of contacts in county governments and other organizations, such as [Benefits Data Trust](#), to provide as much support as possible for these homeowners to redeem their properties. There may also eventually be opportunities for the Tax Sale Ombudsman to travel to undertake public outreach initiatives involving travel to other counties.

I'd advise any interested applications to review the resources at the end of this solicitation, but other responsibilities include:

- Assisting homeowners with understanding the process for collection of delinquent taxes;
- Assisting homeowners with applying for tax credits, discount programs, and other public benefits that may assist them in paying delinquent taxes;
- Referring homeowners to legal services, housing counseling, and other social services that may assist homeowners in paying delinquent taxes;
- Maintaining a website that provides all of this information;
- Conducting annual surveys of counties' tax sale processes (first by December 31, 2020); and
- Reporting annually on specific information obtained from counties regarding tax sales (first due on December 31, 2020).

The Ombudsman will have the full support of SDAT to attain these goals.

One final key responsibility of this Tax Sale Office is maintaining a toll-free telephone number that a homeowner may call to obtain this information. The initial plan is that the Tax Sale Ombudsman develops the packets and information, and our new Customer Service Center provides that information to anyone who calls.

About the Specific Position & Office:

Although we are looking to hire the Tax Sale Ombudsman as soon as possible, we are still negotiating with DBM on the final PIN and office structure. At this point it appears as though the Ombudsman will be a grade 17 or 18. There is a small chance that the position will be a few grades higher, but since that is presently unlikely we are not interviewing for those higher grades.

The Ombudsman will be appointed by the Director and will be management services, but also may only be removed for incompetency or good cause; *they don't need to be concerned of losing their job with a change in Administration*. For current state employees, regular salary guidelines apply.

We are also still negotiating with DBM regarding any PINs that will be associated with this office. Some PINs will need to go to the Customer Service Center to answer the hotline, but there is the possibility that the Ombudsman will have one or two direct reports. Regardless, the Ombudsman and Customer Service Center Manager will work very closely together.

Job Requirements:

Any applicant must be a self-starter; SDAT has no subject-matter expertise in this area so the Ombudsman will be expected to research and develop county-specific information with little supervision. Any applicant must be a strong writer and have good organizational skills; they must show initiative and be a team player. Preferably they will be able to speak to past-experience dealing with something similar, such as management experience, familiarity with tax sales, or the development of benefit packages, memos, or summaries of existing programs.

How to Apply:

Please send an email to miracle.piper1@maryland.gov with your resume and any attachments you feel would show that you're a good fit for this position. If there are any other questions feel free to call me at 410-767-1142 (but please leave your email in the voicemail in case I don't have time for a phone call).

Additional resources:

- Maryland General Assembly, 2019 CH730 main page:
<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?id=hb1209&stab=01&pid=billpage&tab=subject3&ys=2019RS>
- 2019 CH730 bill text (the immediately compelling parts for this position are on page 1-4 and 16-18) http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2019RS/chapters_noln/Ch_730_hb1209E.pdf
- 2019 CH730 fiscal and policy note:
http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2019RS/fnotes/bil_0009/hb1209.pdf
- Video of the House hearing (the bill was amended significantly following this hearing):
<http://mgahouse.maryland.gov/mga/play/41a0da14-fc40-40b1-8381-818296bec70a/?catalog/03e481c7-8a42-4438-a7da-93ff74bdaa4c&playfrom=4032000>
- Video of the Senate hearing (the bill was amended significantly following this hearing):
<http://mgahouse.maryland.gov/mga/play/7b3ba749-19c1-40e7-b9ac-fa10f6bb431b/?catalog/03e481c7-8a42-4438-a7da-93ff74bdaa4c&playfrom=556000>