

Testimony of Samuel T. Adenbaum, Tax Collector Lower Merion Township, before the Pennsylvania Senate Local Government Committee on 19 June 2018

I am Samuel T. Adenbaum. I have been Tax Collector of Lower Merion Township since I was appointed by the Lower Merion Township Board of Commissioners in January 2007. I was elected in November 2007, and re-elected in 2009, 2013, and 2017.

Before my service as Tax Collector, I obtained an MBA from Wharton and had twenty-five years of corporate management experience mostly in Conrail's Finance and Engineering departments. My last position at Conrail was AVP Information Technology.

I collect Township, County, School and Montgomery County Community College taxes on approximately 21,500 parcels with a taxable assessment of about \$7.5 billion. I collect \$270 million in taxes and about \$13 million in trash and sewer fees.

As Tax Collector, I provide significant efficiencies for these entities, and strong customer service to the public. Because we collect taxes for multiple entities on different schedules, we are able to employ professional staff year round. This enables us to provide service to the public at all times and continuity to the different taxing authorities.

We are able to bill the Township's trash fee as a line item on the Township/County tax bill at no additional cost to the Township. The Township also shares my lock box to collect other fees without any additional fixed costs. I work closely with the Township on information technology issues and am the resident expert on retrieving parcel and tax data. I am regularly asked to run reports or create custom computer programs to analyze data for Township staff.

I have paid my taxing authorities with weekly electronic transfers every week. My monthly PA DCED forms have been submitted timely every single month, and there has never been a discrepancy. We send all of our interim tax bills on a monthly basis and we make all of the interim refunds allowed by the taxing districts. My year end reconciliation with the Montgomery County Tax Claim Bureau has never had a discrepancy. We return all excess payments to taxpayers automatically and my annual escheat to the Pennsylvania Treasurer is typically less than \$300. I have been audited by the Township's auditors every year and there has never been an audit finding regarding my office.

In order to provide service to the public and promptly process tax payments, I employ a staff of two full-time employees. I provide vacation, sick leave, full medical benefits and

contribute to their retirement plan. We are open Monday - Friday, Township hours, 8:15 - 4:30. We answer every phone call and only send calls to voicemail when no one is available to answer the phone. We are located in the Township building and taxpayers are welcome to stop in at any time. We accept payments at our window and at deadlines, people are usually lined up to pay.

We answer a variety of questions all day long regarding lost bills, questions about taxes, homestead exemptions and assessments. We keep copies of the PA 1000 form, furnished upon request. We put our tax bills on our website for taxpayers who don't receive them in the mail and send out email reminders when our bills are mailed. We work with families of aging taxpayers who are having difficulty keeping up getting their taxes paid on time. Even with over 20,000 taxpayers, we know who many of our taxpayers are who need extra assistance. Occasionally we reach out to children when their elderly parents are no longer cognitively able to cope with paying their taxes.

I have automated my office extensively. We make use of a lockbox with TD Bank, and contrary to some of estimates thrown about, lockboxes for large accounts evaluated under "full analysis" are not inexpensive: approximately \$.51 per payment. And lockboxes are helpful for processing exact payments only. They cannot process shortages, overpayments or refund duplicate payments, which we handle. We offer a website where taxpayers can make electronic payments using a credit card or an ACH payment against their bank account. We also have an automatic debit program where taxpayers can sign up to have their payments deducted at discount from their bank accounts without any action at all. Currently about two percent of our taxpayers use this service but it is growing. We also provide information to the big mortgage providers, Wells Fargo, CoreLogic and Lereta, electronically, and they pay their parcels by submitting an electronic list and a Fed wire transfer.

Finally, to facilitate transfers of properties and refinancings, we have a fully automated certification process that combines all relevant information including County, Township, and School District taxes as well as sewer and trash fees on a single certification. This is a significant service to title agents or real estate agents and their clients as they only need one document and pay only one fee.

I have excellent relationships with all of my taxing authorities. We constantly strive to improve our operations and innovate to provide strong customer service to the public.

Thank you.