

New York State Department of Taxation and Finance
Taxpayer Services Division
Technical Services Bureau

TSB-A-95 (2)R
Real Estate Transfer Tax
Real Property Transfer
Gains Tax
April 4, 1995

STATE OF NEW YORK
COMMISSIONER OF TAXATION AND FINANCE

ADVISORY OPINION

PETITION NO. M941109B

On November 9, 1994, a Petition for Advisory Opinion was received from Lew R. Wasserman, Jean Stein, Gerald H. Oppenheimer and Andrew Shiva, as Trustees of Annuity Trusts I & II under the Restatement of Doris Jones Stein Family Trust dated 4/20/82, P.O. Box 30, Beverly Hills, California 90213.

The issues raised by Petitioners, Lew R. Wasserman, Jean Stein, Gerald H. Oppenheimer and Andrew Shiva, as Trustees of Annuity Trusts I & II under the Restatement of Doris Jones Stein Family Trust dated 4/20/82, are:

1. Whether the combining of Annuity Trust I and Annuity Trust II, two charitable lead trusts, will be exempt from the Real Estate Transfer Tax (hereinafter the "transfer tax") as a mere change of identity of ownership or organization.
2. Whether the combining of Annuity Trust I and Annuity Trust II, two charitable lead trusts, will be exempt from the Real Property Transfer Gains Tax (hereinafter the "gains tax") as a mere change of identity of ownership or organization.

On April 20, 1982, Doris Jones Stein (the "Trustor"), as trustor, created a revocable inter vivos trust, known as the Doris Jones Stein Family Trust (the "Family Trust"). The instrument establishing the Family Trust, as amended and restated on April 20, 1982, provides for the creation of two charitable lead trusts following the death of the Trustor. The two trusts are referred to separately as "Annuity Trust I" and "Annuity Trust II" and collectively as the "Trusts". The Trustor died on April 7, 1984, and Annuity Trust I and Annuity Trust II were thereafter established in accordance with the terms of the Family Trust instrument and under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles County Superior Court.

Annuity Trust I and Annuity Trust II are each required to make certain annual charitable payments until their respective termination dates, at which time any remaining assets are to be distributed to trusts for the benefit of certain heirs of the Trustor or their appointees.

The remainder beneficiaries of Annuity Trust I and Annuity Trust II are trusts for the benefit of the Trustor's grandchildren (the "Grandchild Trusts") and more remote issue (the "Issue Trusts"). The Grandchild Trusts were established, and the Issue Trusts were provided for, at the date of the Trustor's death according to the terms of the Family Trust instrument. There are at present ten living grandchildren of the Trustor and none of the grandchildren have died. Since none of the Trustor's grandchildren have died leaving issue, no Issue Trust has been established.

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The terms and provisions of Annuity Trust I and Annuity Trust II are substantially identical except that they pay different annual amounts to charity and have different termination dates. Annuity Trust I terminates on February 10, 2003 and Annuity Trust II terminates on April 7, 2012. The annual payments for the Trusts are required to be made to the Jules and Doris Stein Foundation (the "Foundation"), an organization exempt from Federal income tax pursuant to Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

The beneficiaries of Annuity Trust I and the beneficiaries of Annuity Trust II are currently identical. Births, deaths and the naming of appointees hereafter could change the identity of the beneficiaries of either Trust. However, it is anticipated that if the Trusts are combined, the beneficiaries of the Trusts will be identical at the time of the combination of the Trusts.

A substantial portion of the assets of Annuity Trust I and of Annuity Trust II consists of stocks and securities. In addition, Annuity Trust I and Annuity Trust II are co-owners of two parcels of real property located in New York City (the "New York Properties") in undivided one-third and two-thirds interests, respectively, as tenants-in-common. Recently, both the value and the rental income of the New York Properties have declined. Moreover, due to current economic conditions, the income of the Trusts from their portfolios of stocks and securities has been lower than was foreseen at the time of their creation. As a result of these developments, the Trusts' obligation to make annual contributions to the Foundation are substantially greater than their current income.

Due to the financial difficulties facing the Trusts, the trustees have agreed to combine the Trusts on the terms and subject to certain conditions as set forth in an Agreement to Combine Trusts (the "Agreement"), a Petition for Order Authorizing Combination of Trusts and Amending Trust Instrument to Effectuate Combination to be filed with the Los Angeles County Superior Court, and an Order Authorizing Combination of Trusts and Amending Trust Instrument to Effectuate Combination to be signed by the Los Angeles County Superior Court (the "Order").

The Agreement and the Order provide that, on the effective date specified in the Agreement (the "Effective Date"), Annuity Trust I will be combined with Annuity Trust II. The Surviving Trust will succeed to all of the assets and will assume all of the liabilities of the Trusts existing on the Effective Date. The Surviving Trust will have an obligation to make distributions to the Foundation equal to the sum of obligations currently required of the Trusts. Prior to February 10, 2003 (the termination date of Annuity Trust I), the Surviving Trust will be required to distribute an amount to the Foundation equal to the total of the amount required to be distributed by the Trusts. After that date, the Surviving Trust will be required to distribute to the Foundation only the amount required to be distributed by Annuity II.

The Family Trust provides that the trustees of Annuity Trust I and Annuity Trust II are to be the persons who serve from time to time as the directors of the Foundation. The combination of the Trusts will effect no change in the identity of the trustees. In addition, the trustees will have the same powers with respect to the Surviving Trust that they currently have with respect to the Trusts.

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The Agreement and the Order provide a method for determining the amount and timing of any distribution to be made to the remainder beneficiaries of Annuity Trust I (the "Annuity Trust I Beneficiaries") from the Surviving Trust on February 10, 2003, or thereafter. That method is such that there will be established on the books of the Surviving Trust a financial record referred to in the Agreement as the "Pro Forma Account." The Pro Forma Account will be set up so that the remainder interests of the Annuity Trust Beneficiaries and the Foundation's right to distributions will not be affected by the combination of the Trusts.

The Pro Forma Account will function as follows: all of the assets of Annuity Trust I and Annuity Trust II will be valued at their fair market value as of the Effective Date. The Pro Forma Account will be credited on the Effective Date with the then fair market value of the principal and current and accumulated income contribution to the Surviving Trust by Annuity Trust I, less the liabilities, if any, of Annuity Trust I (other than the liability to make annual payments to the Foundation). All liabilities of the Annuity Trust I on the Effective Date are to be assumed by the Surviving Trust. Thereafter, until February 10, 2003, the Pro Forma Account will be reduced by distributions when and as made to the Foundation by the Surviving Trust, but only up to the amount which would have been distributed by Annuity Trust I had Annuity Trust I remained in existence. Until February 10, 2003, the Pro Forma Account will be increased by an amount of the income of the Surviving Trust equal to the sum of (1) one-third of the gross income from the New York Properties when and as received by the Surviving Trust, plus (2) the remaining gross income of the Surviving Trust when and as received, excluding gross income from the New York Properties, multiplied by a fraction, the numerator of which is the balance of the Pro Forma Account (excluding one-third of the value of the New York Properties) and the denominator of which is the value of the Surviving Trust (excluding the entire value of the New York Properties). Both the numerator and denominator of such fraction shall be determined as of the Effective Date. The Pro Forma Account will also be reduced by (3) one-third of the amount of the expenses of the New York Properties when and as paid, and (4) a portion of the Surviving Trust's expenses unrelated to the New York Properties when and as paid determined by multiplying such expenses by the same fraction as is used for allocating trust income other than income from the New York Properties under clause (2) as aforementioned. In accordance with the Agreement, such computation of the Pro Forma Account will be made not less frequently than annually. Additionally, gross income will include capital gains and expense will include capital losses, such gains and losses to be determined by reference to the carrying value of the Surviving Trust's capital assets.

As of February 10, 2003, the balance of the Pro Forma Account as determined above will be further adjusted by (1) one-third of any previously unrecognized appreciation or depreciation in the New York Properties, (2) one-third of any accrued but unreceived or unpaid income or expenses with respect to the New York Properties, (3) the same fraction as provided in the preceding paragraph of any previously unrecognized appreciation or depreciation in the Surviving Trust's assets other than the New York Properties, and (4) the same fraction of any accrued but unreceived or unpaid income or expenses with respect to assets other than the New York Properties. This determination will require an appraisal of the real property and other non-liquid assets of the Surviving Trust as of February 10, 2003. There will be a distribution to the Annuity Trust I Beneficiaries on

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February 10, 2003, or as soon as practicable thereafter, equal to the positive (but not negative) balance of the Pro Forma Account, but only if the trustees determines that the Surviving Trust will have sufficient liquid assets remaining after such distributions to continue to meet its obligations to the Foundation through the termination date of the Surviving Trust. This determination will be made by the trustees first valuing all of the assets of the Surviving Trust (including the New York Properties) as of February 10, 2003. This amount will be reduced by (1) the balance of the Pro Forma Account as of that date and (2) the value of any real estate and any other nonliquid assets of the Surviving Trust. The resulting balance, referred to in the Agreement as the "Net Value," will reflect the value of the available liquid assets of the Surviving Trust as of February 10, 2003. The trustees will then determine the present value of all future payments required to be made to the Foundation, using a discount rate equal to the average return on investment realized by the Surviving Trust over the immediately preceding five years. This amount will then be increased by 10%. The resulting amount, referred to in the Agreement as the "Discounted Payments," is intended to reflect the present value of the obligation of the Surviving Trust to the Foundation, with a 10% safety factor added. If the Net Value equals or exceeds the Discounted Payments, then a distribution equal to the positive balance of the Pro Forma Account will be made to the Annuity Trust I Beneficiaries on February 10, 2003, or as soon thereafter as practicable. If the Net Value is less than the Discount Payments, then no distribution will be made as of February 10, 2003.

If the Net Value does not equal or exceed the Discounted Payments as of February 10, 2003, the Pro Forma Account will thereafter be credited with interest at the legal rate on judgements under California law, but shall not be increased or reduced by any income, expenses, gains or losses of the Surviving Trust accrued after February 10, 2003. The Annuity Trust I Beneficiaries will receive notice of their respective interests in the Surviving Trust, if any, which will be their respective shares of the positive balance of the Pro Forma Account that would have been distributed to them on February 10, 2003, but for the fact that the Surviving Trust did not have sufficient liquid assets to meet its future obligations to the Foundation at that time. The Annuity Trust I Beneficiaries will be informed in writing that their interests in the part of the Surviving Trust represented by the Pro Forma Account are fully vested as of February 10, 2003, and are fully transferable.

If no distribution is made to the Annuity Trust I Beneficiaries as of February 10, 2003, the trustees of the Surviving Trust will make a similar computation to that described above as of December 31, 2004, and as of December 31st of each succeeding year until the Net Value equals or exceeds the Discounted Payments, so that a distribution equal to the Pro Forma Account may be made. If no distribution is made to the Annuity Trust I Beneficiaries prior to the termination of the Surviving Trust, then upon termination of the Surviving Trust, the Annuity Trust I Beneficiaries will receive a distribution equal to the positive balance of the Pro Forma Account, if any, as of the date of termination, and the Annuity Trust II beneficiaries will receive a distribution equal to the balance of the Surviving Trust.

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In accordance with Section 1402 of the Tax Law, a real estate transfer tax is imposed on each conveyance of real property or interest therein at the time that the instrument effecting the conveyance is delivered by a grantor to a grantee when the consideration for the conveyance exceeds five hundred dollars.

Section 1401(e) of the Tax Law provides, in pertinent part, that the term "conveyance" means the transfer or transfers or any interest in real property by any method. This would include a conveyance upon the combination of trusts with an interest in real property.

Section 1405 of the Tax Law provides, in part, as follows:

Sec. 1405. Exemptions. - - (a) The following shall be exempt from payment of the real estate transfer tax:

* * *

6. Conveyances to effectuate a mere change of identity or form of ownership or organization where there is no change in beneficial ownership, other than conveyances to a cooperative housing corporation of the real property comprising the cooperative dwelling or dwellings;

In addition, pursuant to Sections 1441 and 1443.1 of the Tax Law, a tax is imposed on gains derived from certain real property transfers (the gains tax) where the property is located in New York State and where the consideration received or the transfer is \$1 million dollars or more.

Section 1440.7 of the Tax Law defines the term "transfer of real property", in part, to mean the transfer or transfers of any interest in real property by any method. This would include a transfer upon combination of trusts with an interest in real property.

Section 1443 of the Tax Law provides, in part, as follows:

Sec. 1443. Exemptions. - - A total or partial exemption shall be allowed in the following cases:

* * *

5. If a transfer of real property, however effected, consists of a mere change of identity or form of ownership or organization, where there is no change in beneficial interest.

In Hilles Timpson, Adv Op Comm T&F, November 3, 1992, TSB-A-92(7)R, the Commissioner held that the transfer of real property to a revocable grantor trust was not subject to gains tax or transfer tax since the transfer of the property did not result in a change in beneficial ownership of the property but rather constituted a mere change in form of identity or form of ownership.

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In the instant case, the beneficiaries of Annuity Trust I and Annuity Trust II are currently identical, and following the combination will remain the same along with their respective interests. In addition, immediately after the combination of the Trusts, the charitable annuitant will have the same rights to distributions that it had prior to the combination. Likewise, the remainder beneficiaries of the Trusts will be entitled to the same portion of corpus to which they were entitled before the combination. Annuity II will terminate upon the same date as before the combination, and the Annuity Trust I Beneficiaries will be entitled to a distribution, or they will have a vested interest in a future distribution, on the same date that Annuity Trust I would have terminated had the combination not occurred.

With respect to issue "1", since the beneficiaries of the Trusts will remain the same and will have the same beneficial interest in the Surviving Trust as they held in the Trusts prior to their combination and the charitable annuitant will have the same rights to distribution that it had before the combination, there is no change in the beneficial ownership of the real property following the conveyance. Accordingly, the combination of the Trusts is deemed a mere change of identity pursuant to Section 1405(b) of the real estate transfer tax. Therefore, pursuant to Section 1405(b) and Hilles Timpson, supra, the conveyance of the interests in real property through the combination of the Trusts will not be subject to the real estate transfer tax.

Moreover, concerning issue "2", since the beneficiaries of the Trusts will remain the same and will have the same beneficial interest in the Surviving Trust as they held in the Trusts prior to their combination and the charitable annuitant will have the same rights to distribution that it had before the combination, there is no change in the beneficial ownership of the real property following the conveyance. Accordingly, the combination of the Trusts is deemed a mere change of identity pursuant to Section 1443.5 of the gains tax. Therefore, pursuant to Section 1443.5 of the gains tax and Hilles Timpson, supra, the transfer of the interests in real property through the combination of the Trusts will not be subject to the gains tax.

DATED: April 4, 1995

/s/
PAUL B. COBURN
Deputy Director
Taxpayer Services Division

NOTE: The opinions expressed in Advisory Opinions
are limited to the facts set forth therein.