

Bond Case Briefs

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TAX - RHODE ISLAND

Apex Oil Company, Inc. v. State by and through Division of Taxation

Supreme Court of Rhode Island - July 14, 2023 - 297 A.3d 96

Oil trader brought two tax aggrievement actions challenging Division of Taxation's denial of trader's claim for a refund of \$4,280,039.44 paid for Motor Fuel Tax assessed on the purchase and sale of 300,000 barrels of oil, as part of chain transaction in which oil trader was contractually responsible to its seller for the tax.

The Sixth Division District Court dismissed. Oil trader petitioned for writ of certiorari, which was granted.

The Supreme Court held that:

- Oil trader demonstrated it suffered injury in fact in order to establish standing to bring tax aggrievement action challenging
- Division's denial of trader's claim for a refund of Motor Fuel Tax;
- There was causal connection between Division's imposition of Motor Fuel Tax on trader's purchase of oil and trader's injury in fact, as required to establish standing to bring tax aggrievement actions challenging Division's denial of trader's claim for a refund of Motor Fuel Tax;
- Seller of oil's assignment of its rights to oil trader did not establish that they were in privity at time settlement was reached between seller and Division, and thus, claim preclusion did not apply to trader's challenge to Division's denial of claim for refund of Motor Fuel Tax; and
- Doctrine of administrative finality did not apply to bar trader's challenge to Division's denial of its claim for refund for Motor Fuel Tax.

Doctrine of administrative finality did not apply to bar oil trader's challenge to Division of Taxation's denial of trader's claim for a refund of \$4,280,039.44 paid for Motor Fuel Tax assessed on purchase and sale of 300,000 barrels of oil as part of chain transaction in which oil trader was contractually responsible to its seller for the tax; seller's request for relief in the initial agency proceedings sought only penalty and interest abatement, while oil trader's request for relief requested a refund of the tax itself based upon its assertion that the tax was improperly imposed, thus, the two requests were not the same or substantially similar.