

# **Cook County Township Assessors' Association**

## **News Release**

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### **Suburban Tax Officials Support Automatic Renewal of Senior Citizen Property Tax Exemptions**

State law should be changed so that Cook County residents who meet the age qualifications for the Senior Citizen property tax exemption do not have to reapply for the exemption each year. This policy change, advocated by the Cook County Township Assessors' Association, would reinstate a policy of automatically renewing the senior exemption, which was in effect between 2008 and 2010. Starting this year, however, a new state law requires that all senior homeowners complete an application to renew their exemptions each year.

The Senior Citizen Exemption provides a discount on property taxes for residential properties that are owned and occupied by a person who is sixty-five years or older. Unlike other senior tax exemptions, the Senior Citizen Exemption is available to all seniors, regardless of income.

The Cook County Township Assessors' Association supports a policy of automatic renewal of the Senior Citizen Exemption for the following reasons:

- People get older, not younger. Once seniors prove that they have reached age sixty-five, they will remain eligible for the exemption for as long as they live in their homes.
- Inevitably, some of the 300,000 senior homeowners in Cook County will not complete the renewal applications, and thus will not receive a tax break for which they are eligible.
- Those who realize they are missing the Senior Citizen exemption will have to apply for refunds, and those refunds will be paid for by cash-strapped local governments.
- Processing as many as 300,000 senior renewal applications adds to the workload of county and township governments at a time when governments are trying to be more efficient in their use of personnel and resources.

Automatic renewal of Senior Citizen exemptions does carry a risk that some will receive exemptions for which they are not eligible; this is the reason the legislature acted to eliminate automatic renewals last year. But policies have been implemented to limit such mistakes. For example, the Senior Citizen exemption is not automatically renewed after a property is sold. This means that a prior owner's senior exemption will not be passed onto a new buyer.

"In a county with nearly 300,000 senior homeowners, it is not possible to have an error-free system for renewing exemptions," said Ali ElSaffar, Oak Park Township Assessor and President of the Cook County Township Assessors' Association. "The salient question is which renewal policy will produce the smallest number of errors. We believe that a policy requiring 300,000 Cook County senior citizens to fill out renewal applications on an annual basis will create far more errors than a policy of automatically renewing the exemptions."

For the above reasons, the Cook County Township Assessors' Association urges the legislature to reinstate the automatic renewal of the Senior Citizen exemption by passing House Bill 1116.

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