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Assessor Fritz Kaegi praises signing of bill authorizing renewal of property tax exemptions due to COVID-19

Signed by the Governor, SB 685 will make senior, disabled persons, and veterans with disabilities exemptions renew automatically

Cook County Assessor Fritz Kaegi today commended Governor J.B. Pritzker and the Illinois General Assembly for passage of SB 685, which automatically renews three homestead exemptions for the next property tax year, among other changes.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has put tremendous pressure on Cook County homeowners. We're pleased to work with the legislature, President Toni Preckwinkle, and the County Board to help at-risk homeowners when they need it most," said Kaegi. "We will continue to work with our partners to make our property tax system fairer for everyone."

SB 685 says that homeowners who get the Persons with Disabilities Exemption, the Veterans with Disabilities Exemption, and the Senior Freeze Exemption will not need to re-apply for them in 2021. Prior to the passage of this bill, homeowners needed to re-apply every year to receive the exemption.

"This bill will benefit tens of thousands of homeowners in Cook County," said Kaegi. "If the homeowner received any of these three exemptions this year, they will automatically get them again next year."

"I am grateful Assessor Kaegi for his advocacy of SB 685, which Governor Pritzker signed into law," said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. "This legislation will be of huge convenience to our seniors, veterans and individuals with disabilities by easing the administrative process of homeowner exemptions. This is especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, as many of these individuals may be at high-risk for the virus."

"This bill helps counties throughout the state assist some of our most vulnerable taxpayers from having to gather at County Assessment Offices just to seek assistance in filling out complicated application forms," said Kane County Supervisor of Assessments Mark Armstrong, who chairs the Legislative and Policy Committee of the County Assessment Officers Association.

The legislature passed a series of COVID-related bills this spring. While there is still work to be done, these bills mark real progress, say the sponsors.

"There is a history of discrimination and unfairness so the legislature still has a lot of work to do," said State Rep. Mary Flowers (D-31 - Chicago), a co-sponsor of the bill. "I was proud to sponsor this bill and work with Assessor Kaegi to make the property tax system more responsive to the needs of property owners. We are going to roll up our sleeves and keep pushing more changes," said Flowers.

"By allowing these exemptions to automatically renew, we're creating instant financial relief for homeowners directly affected by COVID-19," Senate Assistant Majority Leader Iris Y. Martinez (D-20 - Chicago) said. "The selected exemptions are vital for Cook County homeowners most susceptible to the economic devastation associated with this health crisis."



"This legislation is an important step toward ensuring taxpayer relief during the COVID-19 crisis," said bill sponsor and Chair of the House Revenue Committee Rep. Michael Zalewski (D-23 - Riverside). "Thanks to Assessor Kaegi, Treasurer Maria Pappas, and the Cook County Board for their leadership on this issue."

Under the bill, homeowners who received the Persons with Disabilities Exemption, the Veterans with Disabilities Exemption, or the Senior Freeze Exemption on property tax bills due in 2020 will not have to re-apply to receive the exemption on bills due in 2021. If homeowners believe they would get a larger exemption due to a worsening disability, they can re-apply with this additional information.

Homeowners who are newly qualified to receive any of these exemptions but did not receive it in 2020 will need to apply in 2021.

SB 685, signed into law by Gov. Pritzker, also allows smaller counties to delay penalties for late tax payments and to defer tax sales, both of which are steps taken by the Cook County Board before SB 685 passed.

In 2019, the legislature, at Assessor Kaegi's urging, passed HB 961, which automatically renews the Senior Citizen Homestead Exemption in Cook County. While the Senior Freeze exemption requires proof of income, the Senior Citizen exemption is for any homeowner who is 65 or older.