Property Tax Exemption for Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons

As a result of legislation (Senate Bill 5186) passed in 2015, effective for taxes levied for collection in 2016 and forward, the income levels referenced in this publication will increase by $5,000 each.

JULY 2015

If you are a senior citizen or disabled with your primary residence in Washington State, there are two programs that may help you pay your property taxes and/or special assessments. Your household income and your age or disability determine your eligibility for both programs.

This publication provides an overview of the property tax exemption program that helps senior citizens and disabled persons reduce their payment of property taxes.

For information about the property tax deferral program, see the Property Tax Deferral for Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons fact sheet.

Program Overview

Under the exemption program, the value of your Washington State residence is frozen for property tax purposes, and you become exempt from all excess and special levies and possibly regular levies – resulting in a reduction in your property taxes. The exemption is available for your primary residence and up to five acres* of land. A mobile home may qualify, even if the land where the mobile home is located is leased or rented.

* The exemption is available for a primary residence and one acre of land. If local zoning and land use regulations require more than one acre of land per residence in the area where you live, you may be eligible for a property tax exemption on up to five acres of land.

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for this program you must meet the age or disability, ownership, residency, and income requirements Your application must include proof of your age or disability.

Age and Disability

On December 31 of the year before the tax is due, you must meet one of the following criteria.

- At least 61 years of age
- Unable to to work because of a disability OR a veteran entitled to and receiving compensation from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs at a total disability rating for a service-connected disability.

Example: Your 61st birthday is in November 2014. You may file a 2014 application requesting an exemption on your 2015 taxes.

Ownership

You must own your home in Washington State by December 31 the year before the taxes to be exempted are due. For example, to receive an exemption in 2015, you must own your home by December 31, 2014.

The type of ownership must be in total (fee owner), as a life estate (including a lease for life), or by contract purchase.

A home owned jointly by a married couple, a registered domestic partnership, or by co-tenants is considered owned by each spouse, domestic partner, or co-tenant. Only one person must meet the age or disability requirement. If you share ownership in a cooperative housing unit and your share represents the specific unit or portion where you live, you will be eligible for the exemption of your unit.

If your primary residence or the land under your primary residence is owned by a government entity and you meet the program requirements, you may be eligible for a leasehold excise tax credit.

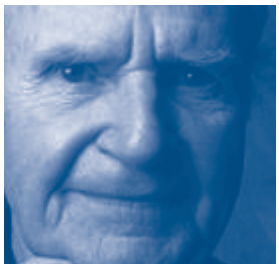
Residency

The property must be your primary residence by December 31 the year before the tax is due. For example, you must be living in your home by December 31, 2014, to receive an exemption on your 2015 property tax. To keep your exemption going forward, you must live in your home for more than six months each year.

Your residence may qualify even if you are in a hospital, nursing home, boarding home or adult family home. You may rent your residence to

someone else during your stay in one of these facilities if the rental income is used to pay the facility costs.

Property used as a vacation home is not eligible for the exemption program.



Household Income
Your annual household disposable income may not exceed $35,000. If your household income is between $35,000 and $40,000, you may qualify for the deferral program. See the Property Tax Deferral for Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons fact sheet for more information.

Household income includes the combined disposable income of you, your spouse or domestic partner, and any co-tenants. A co-tenant is a person who lives in your home and has an ownership interest in your home.

Household income does not include income of a person who:

- Does not have ownership interest and lives in your home, except for a spouse or domestic partner. However, you must include any income that person contributes to the household.
- Has ownership interest in your home but does not live in the home. If someone living elsewhere has any ownership interest, the amount of your exemption will be based on the percentage of your ownership interest in the property.

Property Tax and Levies Eligible for Exemption

The value of your residence is "frozen" as of January 1, 1995, or January 1 of the initial application year, whichever is later.

Example: If you meet the qualifications in the 2014 application year, the taxable assessed value for your residence will remain "frozen" at the 2014 level, unless there is a change in your status or new construction.

The assessor will continue to establish the property market value, but you will only be billed for taxes on the lower of the market value or the frozen value.

If your annual income for the application year is $35,000 or less, your home will be exempt from all excess and special levies. Excess and special levies are in addition to regular levies. They require voter approval and provide money for a specific purpose, for example, school bonds and maintenance and operation levies.

In addition, if your income is $30,000 or less, a portion of the regular levy amount may be exempt.

- If your household income is between $25,001 and $30,000, you are exempt from regular levies on $50,000 or 35 percent of the assessed value, whichever is greater (but not more than $70,000 of the assessed value). **For example:**

Household income	$26,000
Assessed home value	$150,000
Taxable property value	**$97,500**

(35 percent of $150,000 = $52,500)
($150,000 - $52,500 = $97,500)

- If your household income is $25,000 or less, you are exempt from regular levies on the first $60,000 or 60 percent of your home's assessed value, whichever is greater. **For example:**

Household income	$12,000
Assessed home value	$150,000
Taxable property value	**$60,000**

(60 percent of $150,000 = $90,000)
($150,000 - $90,000 = $60,000))

Computing Disposable Income

The maximum amount of annual income you may receive and qualify for the exemption is $35,000. The disposable income you receive during the application year determines your eligibility.

Example: You are filing a 2014 application requesting an exemption on your 2015 taxes. You must use your 2014 income to qualify.

Disposable income includes income from all sources, regardless of whether the income is taxable for federal income tax purposes. Some of the most common sources of income include:

- Social Security and Railroad Retirement benefits.
- Military pay and benefits other than attendant-care and medical-aid payments.
- Veterans benefits other than attendant-care payments, medical-aid payments, veteran's disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation.
- Pension receipts. Include distributions from retirement bonds and Keogh plans. Include only the taxable portion of Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA's).
- Business or rental income. Depreciation cannot be deducted and you may not deduct business or rental losses or use those losses to offset other income.
- Annuity receipts. For purposes of this program, "annuity" is defined as a series of payments, fixed or variable, under a contract or agreement. A "series of payments" means at least one payment per period over more than one period.

A period can be a week, month, or year. Payment amounts do not have to be equal and payment periods do not have to be consecutive. Some examples of annuity payments include: proceeds from life insurance contracts, unemployment compensation, disability payments, and welfare receipts (excluding amounts received for the care of dependent children).

- Interest and dividend receipts.
- Capital gains other than the gain from the sale of your primary residence that was reinvested in another primary residence within one year. Capital losses may not be deducted from income or used to offset capital gains.

If there was a change in your income prior to November 1 that is expected to last indefinitely, you may estimate your income. Multiply your new average monthly income by 12.

Example: You retired in September and your monthly income is reduced from $2,000 to $1,000 beginning in October. Multiply $1,000 x 12. The total, $12,000, is your new estimated annual disposable income.

Deductions from Disposable Income
To determine your combined disposable income you may take deductions for the following expenses paid by you, your spouse, or your domestic partner:

- Non-reimbursed amounts paid for you, your spouse, or your domestic partner to live in a nursing home, boarding home, or adult family home.
- Non-reimbursed amounts paid for prescription drugs for you, your spouse, or your domestic partner.
- Insurance premiums for Medicare under Title XVIII of the Social Security Act.

- Non-reimbursed amounts paid for goods and services that allow you, your spouse, or your domestic partner to receive in-home care. The care received must be similar to the care provided by a nursing home.
  In-home care includes medical treatment, physical therapy, Meals on Wheels (or similar services), and household and personal care. Personal care includes assistance with preparing meals, getting dressed, eating, taking medications, or personal hygiene. Special furniture and equipment such as wheelchairs, hospitals beds, and oxygen also qualify.

Applying for the Exemption

Your county assessor administers this program and is responsible for determining if you meet the qualifications. Please contact your local assessor's office to request an application form.

If you want an exemption for taxes due in 2015, your application is due December 31, 2014. Your assessor has the authority to accept late applications and, because the assessor uses your 2014 income to determine whether you meet the income requirements, most assessors request that you wait until you receive your year-end income information to submit your application.

Appeal Process

Your county assessor must notify you in writing if your application is denied. You may appeal the assessor's decision to the county Board of Equalization. The county Board of Equalization must receive your appeal by July 1, or within 30 days of when the denial was mailed, whichever date is later.

Refunds for Prior Years

If you paid prior years' taxes because of a mistake, oversight, or a lack of knowledge about this program, you may apply for a refund by filing an application for refund with your county assessor. You must meet all of the qualifications for the exemption as if you had applied at the time the application was due. Separate applications must be submitted for each of the tax years. In order to receive a refund, applications must be filed within three years of the date the taxes were due. Refunds will not be made beyond the three years.

Renewal Applications Every Six Years

A renewal application is required at least once every six years. After your initial application and approval, you will be notified by your county assessor when it is time to submit a renewal application.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What if my circumstances change?

A. A Change in Status Report must be filed with the assessor's office if changes in your income or living circumstances affect the exemption. Change of Status Reports are available from your county assessor or on the Department of Revenue's website at dor.wa.gov under forms, Property Tax.

Change in status includes:

- Death of the eligible applicant (survivors must notify assessor)
- Change in income
- Sale or transfer of the property
- Move to an alternate primary residence
- Change in disability status
- Change in zoning or land use designation if your principle residence includes more than one acre of land

Q. In the event of my death, will my surviving spouse or domestic partner continue to receive the exemption?

A. Your surviving spouse or domestic partner may continue to receive the exemption if he or she is at least 57 years old and meets all of the other eligibility requirements.

Q: In the event of my death, will my heirs have to repay the exemption I received in previous years?

A: No. The exemption you receive under this program is a "gift" and does not have to be repaid. Upon your death, the taxes will be recalculated and pro-rated beginning with the day after your death.

Q. If I sell my home, will the new owner continue receiving the exemption?

A. If you sell your home, the exemption will continue through your period of ownership. The taxes will be recalculated without the exemption for the remainder of the tax year and the new owner will be billed for the portion of taxes for his/her period of ownership.

Q. Can my exemption be transferred to a different residence?

A. If you sell, transfer, or are otherwise displaced from your residence, you may transfer the exempt status to a replacement residence. However, you may not receive an exemption on more than the equivalent of one residence in any year. When an exemption is transferred to a new residence, the value of the new residence is frozen as of January 1 of the year of change.

If you are moving to Washington, you may transfer an exemption from another state to your new Washington residence, providing you meet all other eligibility requirements and provide proof of the prior exemption and its cancellation date.

Laws and Rules

Revised Code of Washington (RCW) Chapter 84.36 379-389—Exemptions (Property Tax)

Washington Administrative Code (WAC) Chapter 458-16A-100 through 150—Senior Citizen/Disabled Persons Property, Tax Exemptions

For More Information

If you need help or have questions regarding the property tax exemption, application form, or the application process, contact your local county assessor's office. The telephone number is listed in the local county government pages (usually the blue pages) of your telephone book.

If you have questions about the laws and rules governing this program contact the Washington State Department of Revenue at (360) 534-1400.

Visit our website at http://dor.wa.gov

For tax assistance or to request this document in an alternate format, visit http://dor.wa.gov or call 1-800-647-7706. Teletype (TTY) users may call (360) 705-6718.

Department of Revenue
Washington State

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