

Exemptions for Everyone

Letter to the Editor

The New York State Assessors' Association just doesn't understand the workings of state government. All the news coming from Albany is about real property tax relief. There's the circuit breaker, the tax cap, pressure on local government to share services, consolidate, and disband, but then our State legislators propose exemptions for almost every special interest group you can think of.

Tuesday, May 12, 2009, the agenda of the Assembly Real Property Tax Committee included 32 bills that either create new or expand existing exemptions of real property taxes. Who are the legislators asking tax breaks for? Here's a small sample:

A04525 – a 10% exemption for teachers, police officers and firefighters that work in the municipality where they reside

A05118 – up to a \$100,000 exemption for “rod and gun club” property assessed for less than \$500,000

A06261 – a 10% exemption for members of auxiliary police organizations

A06450 – a 5% exemption for members of the coast guard auxiliary

Plus all the other groups such as first-time homebuyers, volunteer firefighters & ambulance members, senior citizens, veterans, non-profit organizations, disabled and farmers are included in this one agenda.

How do we deal with rising real property taxes when legislators keep shrinking the tax base? Does everyone understand that every time an exemption is granted, everyone else pays more in taxes? State legislators have the power and control to exempt real property from local taxes and the State gets no income from the property tax. Is there a correlation in this? They can pander to special interests groups at no expense to the state budget while at the same time; place the blame for higher property taxes at the feet of local government.

Some of the proposed legislation on this agenda is local option and some is not. How can the bills that are not local option be offered up without complying with the Governor's Executive Order #17? This executive order specifically states, “any legal requirement that a local government grant any new property tax exemption or broaden the eligibility, or increase the value of any existing property tax exemption”. Because your legislators don't have to follow the Executive Order, only state agencies.

So every year these bills are submitted by state legislators and every now and then a few of them are passed and signed into law and unless you are one of the lucky groups to be included in the exemption, your local taxes go up. Please tell your state legislator to stop this madness. No more exemptions. Property taxes are too high now; let everyone pay their fair share.

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