

News Release, May 22

Auditor Reynolds Offers Full Support of SB 306 to Extend More Property Tax Relief to Senior Citizens and Disabled Ohioans

COLUMBUS, OHIO — Butler County Auditor Roger Reynolds testified in the Senate Ways and Means and Economic Development Committee Wednesday morning in support of Senate Bill 306, legislation designed to expand eligibility for Ohio's Homestead Exemption program.

The bill, which State Senator Gary Cates, R-West Chester, co-sponsored, would extend property tax relief to senior citizens and disabled Ohioans living in housing cooperatives, as well as seniors who have created irrevocable living trusts, many of whom are currently excluded from receiving benefits.

In House Bill 119, last year's state budget bill, the General Assembly approved an expansion of Ohio's Homestead Exemption to include all Ohioans age 65 or older, as well as disabled Ohio residents, regardless of their income level. However, a number of residents in this group were denied property tax benefits because of their living arrangements.

Following is the text of Auditor Reynolds' remarks before the committee:

"Today I respectfully stand before this committee in full support of Senate Bill 306, which will amend the Ohio Revised Code to expand the definition of "owner" within the Homestead Act to included settlers holding homestead title in irrevocable trusts.

"Like much of the country, Ohio is experiencing an unstable economy. One of the groups hit the hardest by the weakening economy is our senior citizens and permanently and totally disabled citizens. The Homestead Act implemented in 2007 provides much needed tax relief to seniors and the disabled. Clearly, the financial relief was welcomed as evident by last year's overwhelming response for the exemption. In my role as Auditor, I review applications from home owners requesting a waiver of penalty and interest as a result of late property tax payments. I received several requests by seniors who for the first time paid their tax bill late due to limited financial means. I'm certain all of us here are familiar with at least one example regarding the needs of seniors and disabled Ohioans in today's economic climate.

"Last year's Homestead Exemption, despite its good intentions and solid results, did not include all deserving senior citizens and permanently and totally disabled citizens who owned homes in Ohio. The language of the Act omits those who had placed their homes in irrevocable trusts. The idea of the original legislation was to help those who owned their home regardless of their estate planning arrangement. Irrevocable trusts make a great deal of sense for many senior citizens and permanently and totally disabled Ohioans. Senate Bill 306 would allow the exemption for homesteads held in irrevocable trusts and thus granting previously intended but currently excluded citizens to take part in the tax relief.

“In essence, now is the opportunity for this committee and eventually the Senate to make the Homestead Exemption apply fairly for all seniors and disabled Ohioans. By approving Senate Bill 306, your Committee has taken an important step in assuring that senior and disabled tax relief will be available for all who sincerely need it.

“Again, thank you for your valuable time and the opportunity to appear before this Committee.”

In response, Senator Cates said, “I appreciate Mr. Reynolds coming to testify on a bill that will further expand property tax relief to the citizens of Butler County.”

SB 306 was approved by the Ways and Means Committee on Wednesday and now awaits a vote from the full Senate.