

## **SENIOR EXEMPTION**

### **What is this exemption all about?**

November 1998, voters approved an amendment to the Florida Constitution authorizing the state legislature to pass a law allowing counties and municipalities to grant an additional homestead exemption of up to \$50,000 to persons at least sixty-five (65) years of age whose total household adjusted gross income does not exceed a set limit. Each January, the income limit is adjusted by the percentage change in the average cost-of-living index.

### **Does this additional exemption apply to all ad valorem taxes?**

No. The limited income senior exemption only applies within the county or municipality that authorizes an additional exemption. School taxes and independent tax district taxes (such as water management districts) are not covered by this exemption.

### **Is this exemption uniform like regular homestead exemption?**

No. A county or municipality must enact an ordinance that sets the amount of an exemption, not to exceed \$50,000, and may specify whether or not the additional exemption applies to all its tax levies - including dependent special districts and municipal service taxing units. A county or municipality may establish a different exemption amount (or none at all) to apply to all tax levies for dependent special districts or municipal service taxing units within their jurisdiction.

Unless a county or municipality enacts an ordinance by December 1 preceding the tax year, no additional exemption will apply to that county's or municipality's taxes during that year.

Polk County as well as the cities of Lakeland and Winter Haven has authorized up to \$50,000 additional exemption. Lake Wales, and Davenport have authorized up to \$25,000 additional exemption.

### **Who is eligible for the additional exemption?**

To be eligible for the additional exemption, a homeowner must meet two criteria in addition to qualifying for regular homestead exemption:

- Be at least 65 years of age as of January 1
- Have a total household adjusted gross income that does not exceed the set limit during the preceding tax year.

**NOTE:** The exemption is based on the previous year's income which cannot exceed the set limit\* [Visit the DOR website to see the current income limit.](#)

\* (To be adjusted each January for inflation)

### **What kind of proof of age is needed?**

Generally, any of the following items will be accepted as proof of age:

- Florida driver's license or Florida ID card
- Certified copy of birth certificate
- Marriage certificate, showing full name and date of birth
- Passport
- Any other official and/or certified record or document that demonstrates the applicant's true age to the satisfaction of the property appraiser.

### **How is "household" defined?**

"Household" means a person or group of persons living together in a room or group of rooms as a housing unit. The term does not include any persons boarding in or renting a portion of the dwelling.

### **What is "total household income"?**

This term applies to the sum of income for all members of the household. The law has defined "household income" to be the same as the adjusted gross income figure that is calculated and reported on income tax form 1040.

In general, adjusted gross income includes every type of income from almost any source that is required to be reported to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). This includes Social Security income above certain base amounts as set by the IRS.

The following link will provide you with more information regarding Adjusted Gross Income [http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/26/usc\\_sec\\_26\\_00000062----000-.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/26/usc_sec_26_00000062----000-.html)

### **How can I apply?**

All persons seeking the additional homestead exemption must complete and sign a sworn statement of adjusted gross income of household on or before March 1 of each year. This form requires the full name, date of birth and Social Security number for each person residing in the household.

This sworn statement must be supported by income documentation. All necessary income documentation must be submitted to the property appraiser for review prior to June 1. Effective 2003, persons renewing the senior exemption need only to submit the sworn statement. Income documentation need only be furnished upon request by the Property Appraiser's office.

### **What kind of income documentation is required?**

State law requires that copies of any federal income tax returns, any wage and earnings statements (W-2 forms), and any other documents (such as income worksheets) for each member of the household be provided to the property appraiser. The property appraiser cannot grant the additional exemption without the required documentation.

### **What is the new long-term resident senior exemption?**

The BOCC has adopted Amendment 11 that provides an additional property tax exemption for seniors who have lived in their home for at least 25 years and meet the current income limits. [Click here](#) for additional information.

## **How do I renew my exemption?**

The Senior 65 and Over Exemption will be renewed automatically. If you would like a notice of renewal sent via email, please send us an email at <mailto:paoffice@polk-county.net> with your name, property address and confirmation of your request. If your income or household members has changed, YOU MUST NOTIFY THIS OFFICE.

If, in the future, **your total household adjusted gross** income exceeds the statutory limit, **YOU MUST NOTIFY THIS OFFICE**. Receiving no notification from the qualified senior will be considered a sworn statement, under penalty of perjury, that the income does not exceed the limit. Statutory limits will be posted on our website: [www.polkpa.org](http://www.polkpa.org) and on the Florida Department of Revenue website: [dor.myflorida.com/dor/property/resources/limitations.html](http://dor.myflorida.com/dor/property/resources/limitations.html).  
**Improperly claiming any exemption could result in a lien against your property.**

## **Where can I file?**

### **Bartow Office**

255 North Wilson Avenue  
Bartow, Florida 33830  
Phone: (863) 534-4777  
Fax: (863) 534-4753  
Hours: Monday to Friday, 8:30 AM - 5:00 PM  
[paoffice@polk-county.net](mailto:paoffice@polk-county.net)

### **Lakeland Branch Office**

930 E. Parker Street, Suite 272  
Lakeland, FL 33801  
Phone: (863) 802-6150  
Fax: (863) 802-6163  
Hours: Monday to Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM

### **Winter Haven Branch Office**

3425 Lake Alfred Road  
3 Gill Jones Plaza  
Winter Haven, FL 33881  
Phone: (863) 401-2424  
Fax: (863) 401-2428  
Hours: Monday to Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM

**The Northeast Polk County Government Center is located alongside the Gil Jones Campus in the old State Farm Offices off US Hwy 17. The Government Center houses the Polk County Property Appraiser's Office, and other Polk County Agencies including the Supervisor of Elections, Polk County Health Department, the Clerk of Courts offices, Probation Services, and the State Attorney's Office.**