

Department of Tax Administration

LOB #100

TAX RELIEF FOR SENIORS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Purpose

Virginia law permits the local governing body to adopt tax relief programs for certain individuals 65 years of age or older or who are permanently and totally disabled. The Board of Supervisors has had this program in place for decades. The Board has made a number of changes to the tax relief real estate program over the years – the last amendment being in FY 2006 at which time the allowable net asset limit was increased from \$240,000 to \$340,000 and the allowable gross income level was increased from \$52,000 to \$72,000. There are no longer any state caps mandated for the tax relief income and asset levels. These are now determined locally by the governing body.

The Tax Relief Section reports directly to the DTA director and functions as an essential part of DTA's service delivery and financial control in the audit and review of tax relief applications and determines eligibility based on current program requirements. Tax Relief staff are tasked with ensuring citizens are well educated on matters of tax relief and are provided the highest level of customer service. By providing high quality customer service and promoting an empowered, well-informed community, DTA continues to meet its mission.

Description

The Tax Relief Section assists citizens who are 65 years or older or permanently and totally disabled to obtain relief from real estate and personal property taxes. In addition to homeowners, this office administers a program to provide tax relief for residents who rent rather than own a home. All tax relief applicants must meet certain income and asset eligibility requirements.

Tax Relief staff are trained to understand the tax relief program requirements and process all tax relief applications. The Tax Relief Outreach Program is an integral part of DTA's customer service delivery providing County residents with on-site assistance with the application process and eligibility information regarding tax relief. Staff in the Tax Relief Section have intensified efforts to educate eligible residents about the program through public outreach initiatives, such as scheduling personal appointments (home visits), sending staff to speak at community meetings, workshops hosted by members of the Board of Supervisors, assisted living and senior centers, and places of worship throughout the County. Interpreters are also provided for residents with limited English as well as hearing-impaired residents.

DTA's goal is to administer the tax relief program in a manner which ensures all eligible residents receive proper benefits in accordance with the law.

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Benefits

The Tax Relief program provides a safety-net that strengthens and helps prevent certain elderly or disabled citizens on fixed incomes from facing a disproportionately onerous tax burden. The Board of Supervisors gives consideration to the Tax Relief program each year as part of its deliberation on the budget. The current program serves approximately 8,000 applicants.

Tax Relief staff operate an Outreach Program that enables staff to become accessible to County residents, many of whom may face mobility challenges, by providing on-site education and assistance regarding tax relief eligibility and requirements. During scheduled outreach visits, staff have assisted up to 90 individuals at a time who might otherwise submit incomplete applications or visit the Government Center for assistance. Another highlight of the program is that seniors have the opportunity to sit down and ask questions and discuss their own situations.

DTA contributes to the County's vision element of Maintaining Safe and Caring Communities by offering real estate tax relief to a vulnerable segment of the community. The financial auditing of applications embodies the County's vision element of Exercising Corporate Stewardship. Staff's efforts to reach the senior and disabled population by electronic means, mail, in person and through community outreach efforts support the County's vision element of Connecting People and Places. DTA is committed to outstanding communication, and promoting an empowered and well-informed community.

Mandates

This Line of Business is not mandated.

Tax Relief is a local option program. Authority for this program is found in Virginia Code § 58.1-32 and Chapter 4 of the [Fairfax County Code](#). The Board of Supervisors has the authority to expand, cancel or scale back this program if it so desires. To that extent, the program is not mandated. However, as long as this program remains established by local ordinance, DTA has the mandate to provide appropriate financial stewardship and administration of the program that impacts General Fund revenue by approximately \$26 million annually.

Trends and Challenges

In addition to the growth of the senior population, citizens who are foreign born and/or speak a language other than English at home, make up a significant percent of the County population. In recent years, the changes in demographics have challenged staff to become better equipped in serving a diverse community. The growth in these two segments, coupled with the overall population growth over the past five years, poses a continual challenge to provide exceptional service to the public as well as maintaining best practices for tax relief application processing. Moreover, given the present income and net asset limits, the complexity of financial documentation that staff must audit has increased significantly.

The Tax Relief Section works closely with DIT to take full advantage of emerging technologies. The recent implementation of a new Tax Relief computer system provides DTA with enhanced ability to support some of the County's most important residents, the elderly and disabled. The new computer application replaced an old mainframe system with web-enabled functionality. Programmed in-house using open system architecture, the Tax Relief system is integrated with the County's Real Estate and Personal Property Tax systems. The new system helps staff ensure that these citizens are assessed accurately and receive the proper levels of tax relief.

The application of new technologies and service delivery methods has aided DTA in keeping pace with the ever-changing landscape of citizen needs. The tremendous growth in the use of technology has resulted in significant efficiencies for both the public and DTA staff. Service trends remain focused on technology which promotes convenience, security and ease of customer relations. DTA remains focused on the technological environment to ensure the most suitable, user-friendly, and secure technology is employed.

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Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #100: Tax Relief for Seniors and People with Disabilities			
FUNDING			
Expenditures:			
Compensation	\$418,088	\$427,693	\$440,731
Operating Expenses	38,719	50,016	44,439
Total Expenditures	\$456,807	\$477,709	\$485,170
General Fund Revenue	\$28,100	\$27,259	\$27,636
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	\$428,707	\$450,450	\$457,534
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
Positions:			
Regular	5 / 5	5 / 5	5 / 5
Total Positions	5 / 5	5 / 5	5 / 5

Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Tax Relief Applications Processed	9,475	8,922	9,353	9,400	9,400
Requests/Inquiries pertaining to Tax Relief (emails, letters, forms)	22,990	22,003	23,003	23,600	23,600
In-person Service (walk-ins, outreach, home visits)	2,964	5,892	5,258	5,400	5,400
Average customer rating of DTA services (4.0 scale)	3.8	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0

Information inquiries and requests for assistance from the public continue to rise. Population growth, coupled with DTA's mass media advertising efforts and the increased use of email by the senior and disabled population, all contribute to the increased demand for services. Being able to assist the public through the Outreach Program and electronic correspondence has helped DTA remain efficient during times of constrained budgets. DTA's customer service rating of 4.0 indicates a high level of efficiency and customer satisfaction among those surveyed.