

STORAGE NAME: h3071s1.go

DATE: March 11, 1998

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
AS REVISED BY THE COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS
BILL RESEARCH & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT**

BILL #: CS/HJR 3071

RELATING TO: Section 6, Article VII, Florida Constitution

SPONSOR(S): Committee on Governmental Operations, Representative Rodriguez-Chomat and others

COMPANION BILL(S): SB 246(c)

ORIGINATING COMMITTEE(S)/COMMITTEE(S) OF REFERENCE:

- (1) REAL PROPERTY & PROBATE 4 YEAS 0 NAYS
- (2) GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS YEAS 3 NAYS 2
- (3) FINANCE & TAXATION
- (4)
- (5)

I. SUMMARY:

CS/HJR 3071 provides that the Legislature may, by general law and subject to conditions specified therein, allow counties or municipalities, by ordinance, to increase the homestead exemption by an additional amount not to exceed \$25,000 of the assessed value of the real estate for any person who is age 65 or older, and whose household income, as defined by the Internal Revenue Code, does not exceed twenty thousand dollars. This resolution is not self-executing.

The ordinance must provide for the periodic adjustment of the income limitation based upon changes in the cost of living.

The term "household" is defined to mean "a husband and wife, a widow, a widower, a single man, or a single woman."

This resolution would be on the ballot and submitted to the electors at the next general election. If approved, the amendment would take effect January 1, 1999.

This resolution would have a fiscal impact on the Department of State. If implemented, the increased exemption could have a significant fiscal impact on local governments.

II. SUBSTANTIVE RESEARCH:

A. PRESENT SITUATION:

Article VII, Section 4 of the Florida Constitution requires that all property be assessed at just value for ad valorem tax purposes. Just value has been interpreted to mean fair market value. Agricultural land, land producing high water recharge to Florida's aquifers, and land used exclusively for non-commercial recreational purposes are exceptions that may be assessed solely on the basis of their character or use. Tangible personal property held for sale as stock in trade and livestock may be assessed at a specified percentage of its value or totally exempted. In addition, effective January 1, 1994, subsection (c) of Article VII, Section 4, provided a limitation on the extent that assessments for homesteads may be changed annually on January 1 of each year. Changes in assessment may not exceed the lower of 3 percent of the assessment for the prior year or the percent change in the Consumer Price Index.

Article VII, Section 6 of the Florida Constitution authorizes an exemption from ad valorem taxation for homestead property used by taxpayers as their permanent residence. Subsection (a) provides a basic \$5,000 exemption to all qualified homeowners. Subsection (b) prohibits the granting of more than one exemption to any one person or the granting of an exemption that is in excess of the total assessed value of the property. Subsection (c) increases the exemption to \$25,000 for school district levies for all qualified homestead owners and up to \$10,000 for all other ad valorem tax levies if the homestead owner has attained age 65 or is totally or permanently disabled and if the owner is not entitled to the exemption provided in subsection (d). Subsection (d) increases the exemption to \$25,000 for non-school district levies. This subsection further provides that the increase is not applicable upon the effective date of any amendment to Article VII, Section 4 of the Florida Constitution that would authorize the assessment of homestead property at a specified percentage of its just value. A third provision of subsection (d) disallows the increased exemption in counties in which the tax roll has not been certified as in compliance with Article VII, Section 4 of the Florida Constitution. Subsection (e) authorizes the Legislature to give ad valorem tax relief to renters.

B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

CS/HJR 3071 provides that the Legislature may, by general law and subject to conditions specified therein, allow counties or municipalities, by ordinance, to increase the homestead exemption by an additional amount not to exceed \$25,000 of the assessed value of the real estate for any person who is age 65 or older, and whose household income, as defined by the Internal Revenue Code, does not exceed twenty thousand dollars.

The ordinance must provide for the periodic adjustment of the income limitation based upon changes in the cost of living.

The term "household" is defined to mean "a husband and wife, a widow, a widower, a single man, or a single woman."

C. APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES:

1. Less Government:

a. Does the bill create, increase or reduce, either directly or indirectly:

(1) any authority to make rules or adjudicate disputes?

No

(2) any new responsibilities, obligations or work for other governmental or private organizations or individuals?

No

(3) any entitlement to a government service or benefit?

No

b. If an agency or program is eliminated or reduced:

An agency or program is not eliminated or reduced.

(1) what responsibilities, costs and powers are passed on to another program, agency, level of government, or private entity?

N/A

(2) what is the cost of such responsibility at the new level/agency?

N/A

(3) how is the new agency accountable to the people governed?

N/A

2. Lower Taxes:

a. Does the bill increase anyone's taxes?

If implemented, and if local taxing authorities need to keep their revenues constant, they will need to shift the tax burden to other taxpayers.

b. Does the bill require or authorize an increase in any fees?

No

- c. Does the bill reduce total taxes, both rates and revenues?

If passed and implemented, the resolution could result in counties and municipalities increasing homestead exemption of up to \$25,000 to a real property owner who is 65 years of age or older, if "household" income does not exceed \$20,000, and subject to any other conditions the Legislature may enact.

- d. Does the bill reduce total fees, both rates and revenues?

No

- e. Does the bill authorize any fee or tax increase by any local government?

No

3. Personal Responsibility:

- a. Does the bill reduce or eliminate an entitlement to government services or subsidy?

No

- b. Do the beneficiaries of the legislation directly pay any portion of the cost of implementation and operation?

No

4. Individual Freedom:

- a. Does the bill increase the allowable options of individuals or private organizations/associations to conduct their own affairs?

No

- b. Does the bill prohibit, or create new government interference with, any presently lawful activity?

No

5. Family Empowerment:

- a. If the bill purports to provide services to families or children:

The bill does not purport to provide services to families or children.

STORAGE NAME: h3071s1.go

DATE: March 11, 1998

PAGE 5

(1) Who evaluates the family's needs?

N/A

(2) Who makes the decisions?

N/A

(3) Are private alternatives permitted?

N/A

(4) Are families required to participate in a program?

N/A

(5) Are families penalized for not participating in a program?

N/A

b. Does the bill directly affect the legal rights and obligations between family members?

No

c. If the bill creates or changes a program providing services to families or children, in which of the following does the bill vest control of the program, either through direct participation or appointment authority:

The bill does not create or change a program providing services to families or children.

(1) parents and guardians?

N/A

(2) service providers?

N/A

(3) government employees/agencies?

N/A

D. STATUTE(S) AFFECTED:

None. The resolution would amend Section 6, Article VII of the Florida Constitution.

E. SECTION-BY-SECTION RESEARCH:

See Effect of Proposed Changes.

III. FISCAL RESEARCH & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT:

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE AGENCIES/STATE FUNDS:

1. Non-recurring Effects:

The Division of Elections estimates that the total cost to advertise the proposed constitutional amendment twice in a newspaper of general circulation in each county prior to the 1998 general election is \$35,000.

Estimates of the loss of revenue to local governments if this resolution is passed and implemented are provided in B. below.

2. Recurring Effects:

According to the Revenue Estimating Conference, this resolution should have no impact on General Revenue.

3. Long Run Effects Other Than Normal Growth:

N/A

4. Total Revenues and Expenditures:

N/A

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AS A WHOLE:

1. Non-recurring Effects:

Indeterminant.

2. Recurring Effects:

This resolution would not have an immediate fiscal impact (with the exception of the cost of advertising the proposed amendment prior to the general election), because implementing language, as well as passage of an ordinance, is required. If the resolution is implemented by general law, and subsequently through local ordinance, it will have an impact on counties, municipalities, school boards, and special taxing districts. To the extent that the local taxing authority is not levying the maximum millage allowed by the tax cap, this resolution would reduce the tax base and may result in a tax shift to taxpayers who would not be entitled to the additional exemption. If the local taxing authority has already reached the millage tax cap, the local taxing authority would experience a reduction in revenue.

With regard to the original resolution, the Revenue Estimating Conference, estimated revenue losses for local governments for fiscal year 2001-02 to be from \$576.5 (high) to \$472. (low) million. This estimate **does not** take in to consideration the committee substitute provision that limits those persons eligible for the additional homestead exemption to those with a household income that does not exceed \$20,000. This limitation should significantly reduce the fiscal impact; however, no estimate is currently available which takes into consideration the household income cap.

This estimate with regard to the original resolution includes the following assumptions:

- * The full \$25,000 will be allowed statewide.
- * The percent of homeowners meeting the age requirement of this amendment will be the percent of households with a member age 65 or more.
- * An inflation adjustment is not required for homestead value because homes valued up to \$50,000 do not appreciate.

3. Long Run Effects Other Than Normal Growth:

Indeterminant.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

1. Direct Private Sector Costs:

If millage rates are raised in certain areas by local taxing authorities to compensate for the decreasing tax base which could result from this resolution, the tax burden would be shifted from those owning homes who are 65 and older to younger owners of homes and to other types of property.

2. Direct Private Sector Benefits:

If a general law is passed, and if a local ordinance is passed, elderly homeowners, with a household income not to exceed \$20,000, will benefit from reduced ad valorem taxes.

3. Effects on Competition, Private Enterprise and Employment Markets:

N/A

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

Household means a "husband and wife", a single person, or a widow/widower. According to the language of CS/HJR 3071, if a single person (or widow/widower) makes \$20,000 or less, then he or she could get an additional \$25,000 homestead

exemption; whereas, two people living together as husband and wife whose combined income is \$40,000 or less do not get the exemption -- together they must have a household income the same as a single person in order to receive the additional exemption.

IV. CONSEQUENCES OF ARTICLE VII, SECTION 18 OF THE FLORIDA CONSTITUTION:

A. APPLICABILITY OF THE MANDATES PROVISION:

The mandates provision does not apply to joint resolutions to amend the Florida Constitution.

B. REDUCTION OF REVENUE RAISING AUTHORITY:

The mandates provision does not apply to joint resolutions to amend the Florida Constitution.

C. REDUCTION OF STATE TAX SHARED WITH COUNTIES AND MUNICIPALITIES:

The mandates provision does not apply to joint resolutions to amend the Florida Constitution.

V. COMMENTS:

The plain language of the resolution places implementation of the resolution within the discretion of the Legislature. If the Legislature chooses to implement the resolution, the resolution provides that the implementing language may contain "conditions". This would give the Legislature broad latitude in implementation.

Ballot Requirements

Section 101.161(1), Florida Statutes, requires the substance of the amendment, in clear and unambiguous language, be followed by the word "yes" and the word "no" so that a "yes" vote will indicate approval of the proposal and a "no" vote will indicate rejection. Although this resolution does not contain the requisite "yes" and "no" boxes, the ballot language is styled in a manner consistent with placement of "yes" and "no" choices on the actual ballot. Additionally, the proposed ballot language appears to meet the requirement that the explanatory statement not exceed 75 words in length and the ballot title, by which the measure is commonly referred to, not exceed 15 words in length. According to Advisory Opinion to the Attorney General Re Casino Authorization, Taxation, and Regulation, 656 So. 2d 466, 468 (Fla. 1995), section 101.161, Florida Statutes, "requires a title and summary that are 'accurate and informative,' and that '[t]he summary must give voters sufficient notice of what they are asked to decide to enable them to intelligently cast their ballots.'"

The resolution provides that "[t]he legislature may, by general law and subject to conditions specified therein, allow counties or municipalities, by ordinance, to increase homestead exemption by an additional amount not to exceed \$25,000 of the assessed value of the real estate for any person who is sixty-five or older, and whose household income... does not exceed twenty thousand dollars", however, the ballot summary provides that the resolution

would authorize the Legislature "to provide an **additional homestead exemption** of up to \$25,000".

Constitutional Equal Protection of the Law Concerns

This resolution is designed to benefit only those resident homeowners who are age 65 or over whose household income does not exceed \$20,000.

The United States Supreme Court examined the equal protection guaranteed by the United States Constitution in Nordlinger v. Hahn, 112 S. Ct. 2326, 2331 (1992), and stated:

The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, [sec.] 1, [of the United States Constitution] commands that no State shall 'deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.' . . . [U]nless a classification warrants some form of heightened review because it jeopardizes exercise of a fundamental right or categorizes on the basis of an inherently suspect characteristic, the Equal Protection Clause requires only that the classification rationally further a legitimate state interest.

In Nordlinger, the United States Supreme Court upheld Proposition 13, the California property tax system under which increases in assessed value were limited to 2 percent per year until the property was sold or improvements made on the property. The Court considered and rejected a contention that the unfairness of the tax system was made worse because it provided exemptions from taxation for two special classes of new owners including persons aged 55 and older. The Court, at 2335, pointed out that it had previously "declined to hold that narrow exemptions from a general scheme of taxation necessarily render the overall scheme invidiously discriminatory." All that the Court requires is a plausible policy reason for the classification or that the exemption rationally further a legitimate purpose. Furthermore, long before Nordlinger, the Court pointed out that:

[I]n taxation, even more than in other fields, legislatures possess the greatest freedom in classification. Since the members of a legislature necessarily enjoy a familiarity with local conditions which [the United States Supreme] Court cannot have, the presumption of constitutionality can be overcome only by the most explicit demonstration that a classification is a hostile and oppressive discrimination against particular persons and classes. The burden is on the one attacking the legislative arrangement to negate every conceivable basis which might support it.

Regan v. Taxation With Representation of Wash., 461 U.S. 540, 547-48 (1983), quoting from Madden v. Kentucky, 309 U.S. 83, 87-33 (1940).

Article I, Section 2 of the Florida Constitution provides that all natural persons are equal before the law and have certain inalienable rights. In his dissenting opinion in Florida League of Cities v. Smith, 607 So. 2d 397 (Fla. 1992), Justice Overton suggested that the tax cap amendment to Article VII, Section 4 of the Florida Constitution may violate the equal protection clause of the Florida Constitution. Someone might also question whether this proposal violates the Florida equal protection clause. The question raised by Justice Overton in the Smith case, however, was whether Florida's equal protection clause was being modified and amended by implication without appropriate notification to the voters. If this proposal is found to have equal protection implications, it might be argued that the

proposed ballot language does not adequately reflect the amendment's possible impact upon the equal protection guarantee within the Florida Constitution.

In Osterndorf v. Turner, 426 So.2d 540 (Fla. 1982), the supreme court struck down durational residency requirements for the \$25,000 homestead exemption as violative of the equal protection clause. The court reasoned that "[i]t is not a legitimate state purpose to reward certain citizens for past contributions to the detriment of other citizens." Id. However, both the Florida and U.S. Supreme Courts have upheld tax exemption disparities as long as there is a "rational basis" for selecting the particular class for special treatment. In Shevin v. Kahn, 273 So.2d 72 (Fla. 1973), aff'd, 416 U.S. 351, the Florida Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of a \$500 homestead tax exemption for widows as having a "'fair and substantial relation' to the ability of women property owners to pay taxes on property of even minimal value." Id.

Related Issues

The 1997 Legislature passed HJR 969 which will be on the ballot in 1998. This resolution would amend the Florida Constitution to permit counties and municipalities to exempt historic properties from ad valorem taxation.

CS/HJR 3071 references "household income, as defined by the Internal Revenue Code". What specific Code definition is meant is not stated. Also, the definition of "household" as provided for in the resolution may affect the construction of the Code provision. Furthermore, the resolution provides that the ordinance provide for an adjustment of the \$20,000 income limitation as a result of the changes in the cost of living. In order to be consistent in the state, it would appear that the Legislature should, by general law, give instruction in this area, since the resolution does not.

VI. AMENDMENTS OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES:

The Committee on Real Property and Probate adopted one amendment which is traveling with the bill. The amendment:

- makes the increased exemption contingent upon the passage of an ordinance;
- provides that in order to qualify for the increased exemption, the "household income" as defined by the Internal Revenue Code, cannot exceed \$20,000;
- provides that the ordinance must provide for the periodic adjustment of the income limitation; and
- defines "household" to mean a husband and wife, a widow, a widower, a single man, or a single woman.

The Committee on Governmental Operations adopted an identical amendment as the one discussed above, and made the resolution a committee substitute. The original resolution simply authorized the Legislature, by general law, to permit an increase in the homestead exemption by an additional amount not to exceed \$25,000 for any person who is age 65 or older.

STORAGE NAME: h3071s1.go

DATE: March 11, 1998

PAGE 11

VII. SIGNATURES:

COMMITTEE ON REAL PROPERTY & PROBATE:

Prepared by:

Legislative Research Director:

P.K. Jameson

P.K. Jameson

AS REVISED BY THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS:

Prepared by:

Legislative Research Director:

J. Marleen Ahearn, Ph.D., J.D.

Jimmy O. Helms