



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY
LANSING

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GOVERNOR

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Bulletin 6 of 2017
June 6, 2017
Poverty Exemption

TO: Assessors and Equalization Directors
FROM: State Tax Commission
SUBJECT: Exemption of Principal Residence by Reason of Poverty

Bulletin 5 of 1995, Bulletin 7 of 2010 and Bulletin 5 of 2012 are rescinded.

MCL 211.7u provides for a property tax exemption, in whole or part, for the principal residence of persons who, by reason of poverty, are unable to contribute to the public charges. Principal residence is defined in MCL 211.7dd as a principal residence or qualified agricultural property. MCL 211.7u(1) states that this section does not apply to property of a corporation. Even if a corporation or a limited liability company meets the definition of a principal residence or a qualified agricultural property, it is not be eligible to receive a poverty exemption.

Local Unit Responsibilities:

MCL 211.7u requires local units to annually adopt a policy, including an asset test, used to approve or deny poverty exemptions.

First, local units must annually adopt guidelines which specify the total household income which will be used to approve or deny poverty exemptions. Statute requires that the income levels shall not be set lower than the federal poverty guidelines updated annually by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and published by the State Tax Commission in their annual Procedural Changes Bulletin.

According to the U.S Census Bureau, “income” includes, but is not limited to:

- Money, wages, salaries before deductions, regular contributions from persons not living in the residence
- Net receipts from non-farm or farm self-employment (receipts from a person’s own business, professional enterprise, or partnership, after business expense deductions)
- Regular payments from social security, railroad retirement, unemployment, worker’s compensation, veteran’s payments, public assistance, supplemental security income (SSI)
- Alimony, child support, military family allotments
- Private and governmental retirement and disability pensions, regular insurance, annuity payments

- College or university scholarships, grants, fellowships, assistantships
- Dividends, interest, and net income from rentals, royalties, estates, trusts, gambling or lottery winnings

Second, the local unit policy must include an asset test. The purpose of an asset test is to determine the resources available: cash, fixed assets or other property that could be converted to cash and used to pay property taxes in the year the poverty exemption is filed. The local unit should require that claimants provide a list of all assets when applying for a poverty exemption. Following is a list of assets that may be included in the annual guidelines.

- A second home, land, vehicles
- Recreational vehicles such as campers, motor-homes, boats and ATV's
- Buildings other than the residence
- Jewelry, antiques, artworks
- Equipment, other personal property of value
- Bank accounts (over a specified amount), stocks
- Money received from the sale of property, such as, stocks, bonds, a house or car (unless a person is in the specific business of selling such property)
- Withdrawals of bank deposits and borrowed money
- Gifts, loans, lump-sum inheritances and one-time insurance payments
- Food or housing received in lieu of wages and the value of food and fuel produced and consumed on farms
- Federal non-cash benefits programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps and school lunches

The Michigan Tax Tribunal in *Robert Taylor v Sherman Twp.*, Docket No. 236230 ruled that the asset test does not include the value of the principal residence. Additionally, the Michigan Court of Appeals in *Ferrero v Township of Walton*, No. 302221, ruled that the homestead property tax credit is not to be considered income for poverty exemption purposes.

The local unit policy may provide for an applicant to own possessions in addition to the principal residence and still receive a poverty exemption. Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- Additional vehicles
- More land than a minimum "footprint" for the home
- Equipment or other personal property of value, including recreational vehicles (campers, motor homes, boats, ATV's etc.)
- Bank account(s) (a maximum amount should be specified)

Third, MCL 211.7u(1) allows for partial poverty exemptions to be granted. A partial poverty exemption is an exemption of a percentage of the taxable value of the principal residence rather than the entire taxable value. The local unit can limit poverty exemptions to partial exemptions or to minimum or maximum exemption of their choosing. The State Tax Commission recommends that local governing bodies include within their annual guidelines, language and criteria for granting partial exemptions and/or minimum or maximum exemptions.

Finally, the State Tax Commission recommends that local units develop an application to be used by claimants and a written policy that details the process. To assist local governing bodies, the State Tax Commission has developed a sample application and resolution. See attached.

Taxpayer Filing Requirements:

In order to receive a poverty exemption, a taxpayer must annually file a completed application form and all required additional documentation, with the supervisor, assessor, or the Board of Review where the property is located. The application form may be obtained from the local unit where the property is located and may be submitted on or after January 1 but before the day prior to the last day of the December Board of Review during the year in which the exemption is requested.

To ensure an application is received in time to be heard by a Board of Review, the State Tax Commission recommends the claimant contact the local governing unit directly to verify deadline dates for submission of an application.

In addition to annually filing the application, in order to be eligible for the poverty exemption, a taxpayer must do all of the following:

1. Own and occupy the principal residence.
2. Provide federal and state income tax returns for the current or immediately preceding year, including any property tax credits, for all persons **residing in the principal residence** (disclosure of the income of an owner who is not residing in the principal residence is not required). An alternative affidavit may be filed for all persons residing in the residence who were not required to file federal or state income tax returns in the current or immediately preceding year. (See Form 4988, *Poverty Exemption Affidavit*)
3. Produce a valid driver's license, or other form of identification, if requested by the supervisor, assessor or Board of Review.
4. Produce a deed, land contract, or other evidence of ownership of the property, if requested by the supervisor, assessor or Board of Review.
5. Meet the federal poverty income guidelines determined annually by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services OR meet allowable alternative income guidelines adopted by the local governing body.
6. Meet the asset level test adopted by the local governing body.
7. Meet additional tests reasonably adopted by the local governing body.

Board of Review Responsibilities:

MCL 211.7u(1) indicates: The principal residence of persons who, in the judgment of the supervisor and board of review, by reason of poverty, are unable to contribute to the public charges is eligible for exemption in whole or part from taxation under this act.

The State Tax Commission has determined that the supervisor shall make a recommendation regarding the claimant's petition and the Board of Review shall consider, review and then approve or deny the exemption request.

Additionally, MCL 211.7u(5) states, in part: The Board of Review shall follow the policy and guidelines of the local assessing unit in granting or denying an exemption under this section.

When reviewing an application, the Board of Review should consider all information available to them at that time. They should consider all documentation originally submitted by the taxpayer and any additional relevant information that is available to the Board of Review.

The Board of Review can deviate from the adopted policy and guidelines of the local unit only when there are "substantial and compelling reasons why there should be a deviation from the policy and guidelines." If the Board of Review deviates from the adopted policy and guidelines, they are required by statute to communicate the substantial and compelling reasons for the deviation from the guidelines in writing to the taxpayer.

Appeal Rights:

A property owner or assessor may appeal a decision of the March Board of Review by completing and submitting a petition to the Michigan Tax Tribunal no later than July 31 of the same year. A property owner or assessor may appeal a decision of the July or December Board of Review by completing and submitting a petition to the Michigan Tax Tribunal within 35 days of the July or December Board of Review's denial of the poverty exemption.

An application for poverty exemption, for a specific principal residence, may only be acted upon by the Board of Review once a year. If an application is denied at the March Board of Review, it may not be reheard by the July or December Board of Review during the same calendar year. The taxpayer must file an appeal of the March Board of Review determination to the Michigan Tax Tribunal. Similarly, if an application is denied at the July Board of Review, the December Board cannot rehear that application, the taxpayer must file an appeal to the Michigan Tax Tribunal.

A person who files a claim for poverty exemption is not prohibited from also appealing the assessment on the same property in the same year.

SAMPLE GUIDELINE RESOLUTION FOR POVERTY EXEMPTION

WHEREAS, the adoption of guidelines for poverty exemptions is required of the City Council (Township Board); and

WHEREAS, the principal residence of persons, who the Supervisor/Assessor and Board of Review determines by reason of poverty to be unable to contribute to the public charge, is eligible for exemption in whole or in part from taxation under Public Act 390 of 1994 (MCL 211.7u); and

WHEREAS, pursuant to PA 390 of 1994, the City/Township of _____, _____ County adopts the following guidelines for the Board of Review to implement. The guidelines shall include but not be limited to the specific income and asset levels of the claimant and all persons residing in the household, including any property tax credit returns, filed in the current or immediately preceding year;

To be eligible, a person shall do all the following on an annual basis:

- 1) Be an owner of and occupy as a principal residence the property for which an exemption is requested.
- 2) File a claim with the supervisor/assessor or Board of Review, accompanied by federal and state income tax returns for all persons residing in the principal residence, including any property tax credit returns filed in the immediately preceding year or in the current year or a signed State Tax Commission Form 4988, *Poverty Exemption Affidavit*.
- 3) File a claim reporting that the combined assets of all persons do not exceed the current guidelines. Assets include but are not limited to, real estate other than the principal residence, personal property, motor vehicles, recreational vehicles and equipment, certificates of deposit, savings accounts, checking accounts, stocks, bonds, life insurance, retirement funds, etc.
- 4) Produce a valid driver's license or other form of identification if requested.
- 5) Produce, if requested, a deed, land contract, or other evidence of ownership of the property for which an exemption is requested.
- 6) Meet the federal poverty income guidelines as defined and determined annually by the United States Department of Health and Human Services or alternative guidelines adopted by the governing body providing the alternative guidelines do not provide eligibility requirements less than the federal guidelines.
- 7) The application for an exemption shall be filed after January 1, but one day prior to the last day of the December Board of Review. The filing of this claim constitutes an appearance before the Board of Review for the purpose of preserving the right of appeal to the Michigan Tax Tribunal.

The following are the (insert year) federal poverty income guidelines which are updated annually by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. The annual allowable income includes income for all persons residing in the principal residence.

Federal Poverty Guidelines Used in the Determination of Poverty Exemptions

| Size of Family Unit | 2017 Poverty Guidelines |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | \$ 11,880 |
| 2 | \$ 16,020 |
| 3 | \$ 20,160 |
| 4 | \$ 24,300 |
| 5 | \$ 28,440 |
| 6 | \$ 32,580 |
| 7 | \$ 36,730 |
| 8 | \$ 40,890 |
| For each additional person | \$ 4,160 |

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the supervisor/assessor and Board of Review shall follow the above stated policy and federal guidelines in granting or denying an exemption, unless the Board of Review determines there are substantial and compelling reasons why there should be a deviation from the policy and federal guidelines and these reasons are communicated in writing to the claimant.

The foregoing resolution offered by City Council Member/Township Board Member _____ and supported by City Council Member/Township Board Member _____.

Upon roll call vote, the following voted:

“Aye”: _____

“Nay”: _____

The City/Township Clerk declared the resolution _____.

XXX, Clerk

Date

SAMPLE POVERTY EXEMPTION APPLICATION

I, _____, Petitioner, being the owner and residing at the property that is listed below as my principal residence, apply for property tax relief under MCL 211.7u of the General Property Tax Act, Public Act 206 of 1893. The principal residence of persons who, by reason of poverty are unable to contribute toward the public charges is eligible for exemption in whole or in part from taxation per MCL 211.7u(1).

In order to be considered complete, this application must: 1) be completed in its entirety, 2) include information regarding all members residing within the household, and 3) include all required documentation as listed within the application. Please write legibly and attach additional pages as necessary.

PERSONAL INFORMATION: Petitioner must list all required personal information.

| | | |
|--|--|----------------|
| Property Address of Principal Residence: | Daytime Phone Number: | |
| Age of Petitioner: | Marital Status: | Age of Spouse: |
| Number of Legal Dependents: | Age of Dependents: | |
| Applied for Homestead Property Tax Credit (yes or no): | Amount of Homestead Property Tax Credit: | |

REAL ESTATE INFORMATION: List the real estate information related to your principal residence. Be prepared to provide a deed, land contract or other evidence of ownership of the property at the Board of Review meeting.

| | | |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Property Parcel Code Number: | Name of Mortgage Company: | |
| Unpaid Balance Owed on Principal Residence: | Monthly Payment: | Length of Time at This Residence: |
| Property Description: | | |

ADDITIONAL PROPERTY INFORMATION: List information related to any other property you, or any member residing in the household owns.

| | | | |
|--|------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Do you own, or are buying, other property (yes or no)? If yes, complete the information below. | | Amount of Income Earned from Other Property: | |
| Property Address | Name of Owner(s) | Assessed Value | Amount & Date of Last Taxes Paid |
| | | \$ | |
| | | \$ | |

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION: List your current employment information.

| | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Name of Employer: | Name of Contact Person: |
| Address of Employer: | Employer Phone Number: |

List all income sources, including but not limited to: salaries, Social Security, rents, pensions, IRA's (individual retirement accounts), unemployment compensation, disability, government pensions, worker's compensation, dividends, claims and judgments from lawsuits, alimony, child support, friend or family contribution, reverse mortgage, or any other source of income, for all persons residing at the property.

| Source of Income | Monthly or Annual Income (indicate which) |
|------------------|---|
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CHECKING, SAVINGS AND INVESTMENT INFORMATION: List any and all savings owned by all household members, including but not limited to: checking accounts, savings accounts, postal savings, credit union shares, certificates of deposit, cash, stocks, bonds, or similar investments, for all persons residing at the property.

| Name of Financial Institution or Investments | Amount on Deposit | Current Interest Rate | Name on Account | Value of Investment |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

LIFE INSURANCE: List all policies held by all household members.

| Name of Insured | Amount of Policy | Monthly Payment | Policy Paid in Full | Name of Beneficiary | Relationship to Insured |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

MOTOR VEHICLE INFORMATION: All motor vehicles (including motorcycles, motor homes, camper trailers, etc.) held or owned by any person residing within the household must be listed.

| Make | Year | Monthly Payment | Balance Owed |
|------|------|-----------------|--------------|
| | | | |
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| | | | |

LIST ALL PERSONS LIVING IN HOUSEHOLD: All persons residing in the residence must be listed.

| First & Last Name | Age | Relationship to Applicant | Place of Employment | Amount of Monetary Contribution to Family Income |
|-------------------|-----|---------------------------|---------------------|--|
| | | | | |
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PERSONAL DEBT: All personal debt for all household members must be listed.

| Creditor | Purpose of Debt | Date of Debt | Original Balance | Monthly Payment | Balance Owed |
|----------|-----------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------|
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MONTHLY EXPENSE INFORMATION: The amount of monthly expenses related to the principal residence for each category must be listed. Indicate N/A as necessary.

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Heating: | Electric: | Water: |
| Phone: | Cable: | Food: |
| Clothing: | Health Insurance: | Garbage: |
| Daycare: | Car Expense (gas, repair, etc): | Other (list type): |
| Other (list type): | Other (list type): | Other (list type): |
| Other (list type): | Other (list type): | Other (list type): |
| Other (list type): | Other (list type): | Other (list type): |

