

This letter is not about the importance of funding public schools. Most of us already know and agree how important that is. This letter is about identifying appropriate sources of school funding and helping seniors live with dignity in the comfort of their homes.

Funding for public schools in Oklahoma come from many sources. In addition to residential property tax, these include commercial property tax, mortgage tax, Commissioners of the Land Office (school land), state appropriations, federal grants, gross production tax (oil & gas), Rural Electric Association (REA) Coop, motor vehicle tax, and a host of miscellaneous sources including donations from tribal governments and non-profits, interest income, gifts, student fees, property sales, transfer fees, tuition, rental, and revenue from school activities.

Many seniors 65 and older live on reduced incomes when they retire. This is also a time when they may face increased medical expenses and loss of a spouse's income. Property taxes which can be several hundred dollars a month and tend to increase every year, become a costly burden. Some seniors are eventually forced to make tough choices -- cut living expenses, take out a reverse mortgage or sell the house and move down or move in with a relative. Many people in this age group have already paid property taxes for 40 years or more and deserve a break. They have paid their fair share over the years.

Oklahoma currently offers limited property tax relief for seniors but it is income-based so does not apply to everyone. You must also be eligible for Homestead Exemption which eliminates primary residences on leased land, although these people also pay property taxes based on the value of their homes.

Here are what some other states are doing: 1) Florida – introduced a bill that would require a study on how to eliminate all property taxes on primary residences; 2) Maine – proposed legislation to completely eliminate property taxes for seniors; 3) Michigan – introduced a senate bill that would exempt seniors over the age of 70; 4) Ohio -- a group called "Citizens for Property Tax Reform" is pushing for a constitutional amendment to abolish property taxes entirely.

In addition, several other states have much more generous and senior-friendly property tax exemptions than Oklahoma. Now is the time for our state legislators to get on board and do what is right for Oklahoma seniors. You can find your legislator and their contact information by entering your address on this web site: www.oklegislature.gov/FindMyLegislature.aspx