

## **The ARIZONA SENIOR CITIZENS TAX RELIEF ACT**

The Arizona Senior Citizens Tax Relief Act, SB1268, was critical legislation that failed to pass the House after passing the Senate 28-2. This means thousands of senior citizens in a constitutionally protected class (65 and over making less than \$35,000 per year) could see their property taxes double.

I am grateful to State Senator Judy Burges, often recognized as a “Hero of the Taxpayers,” for her unrelenting support on behalf of taxpayers. Senator Burges shepherded the bill successfully through the Senate, passing it 28-2, including all the Democrats. In the House, I am thankful for the supporting votes of those constitutionally wise and compassionate 11 representatives, which all happen to be Republicans: Rusty Bowers, Noel Campbell, David Cook, Mark Finchem, David Livingston, Becky Nutt, Kevin Payne, Tony Rivero, David Stringer, Bob Thorpe, and Ben Toma.

Rebekah Sanders from the Arizona Republic wrote an excellent and accurate article you can read at the following link. She even took the time to interview a woman directly affected and in danger of losing her childhood home.

<https://www.azcentral.com/story/money/business/consumers/2018/03/28/phoenix-woman-nearly-lost-her-home-lawmaker-cut-taxes/454612002/>

House Speaker J D Mesnard, following a common practice to kill a bill, held SB1268 allowing it to go to the floor in the last hours of the session. Predictably, it worked and SB1268 failed.

Rep. Mark Cardenas (D-19) promised to vote for SB1268 and round up the Democrats’ vote to pass it. Rep Cardenas failed to even try and, in fact, voted against the bill, joining all his Democrat colleagues in the House. Ironically, all the Democrats in the Senate voted for the bill. But Speaker Mesnard held the bill in the House long enough to allow special interests time to muddy the waters with a campaign of misinformation

Despite detailed reviews by constitutional experts in both the House and the Senate, special interests falsely claimed that SB1268 was in conflict with the Arizona Constitution’s uniformity clause. The real fact is, SB1268 carved out the low-income seniors as a special class and treated this class of citizens all the same (uniformly).

They also falsely claimed there would be a huge tax shift. The real fact is, tax levies would not have changed and any tax shift would have amounted to almost nothing as only about 22,000 homeowners statewide qualify for this program out of millions of Arizona properties.

Arizona voters spoke loudly and clearly when they amended our state constitution carving out low-income seniors to shield them from ever increasing property taxes which puts them at risk of losing their homes to tax lien foreclosures.

Legislators made a promise to protect this vulnerable group of seniors. That's what SB1268, the Arizona Senior Citizens Tax Relief Act, was designed to do. In addition, the State General fund would receive a benefit of \$3 million per year EVERY YEAR!

In Maricopa County alone, from 2008 through 2015, foreclosures increased by over 1300%.

As Treasurer, I am committed to the taxpayers of Maricopa County and the state of Arizona. Reducing the heavy tax burden placed on our seniors helps keep them in their homes. These people worked hard all their lives and do not deserve to lose their homes to government because of taxes they could not anticipate. One simple solution was SB1268 that would have moved the qualifying low-income senior's primary residence from class 3 to class 6.

For this small group of elderly currently in the Elderly Assistance Program their primary taxes now may **double** because of the legislature's failure to pass SB1268.

An interesting note is the well-to-do who live in historic districts are at this lower rate since the legislature moved their personal residences from Class 3 to Class 6. However, low-income seniors who meet the constitutional qualification of protection do not get that same break. That is unconscionable.

I will continue to work to protect all taxpayers, especially our senior citizens and veterans, from the heavy burden of taxes.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Royce T. Flora".

Royce T. Flora, Maricopa County Treasurer