

Automatic Renewal of Homestead Exemptions in Cook County, Tax Years 2022–2024

Homestead exemptions reduce the taxable value of the applicant's home, saving money when tax bills are due. To qualify for the savings, most exemptions require an annual application, filed by the homeowner with the assessor. But in recent years, changes to the law allow the Cook County Assessor's Office (CCAO) to renew exemptions without an annual application. If the CCAO can determine eligibility without an application, the exemption may be renewed automatically.

The CCAO checks each home that receives a homestead exemption every year, looking for flags that the applicant may no longer be eligible for the savings. If the CCAO finds reason to think the applicant has lost eligibility – if there is a death certificate that might be the owner, if the title to the property changed hands, if the applicant filed a change of address form with the Secretary of State or the US Postal Service – then we ask the owner to reapply. This review is part of our enforcement work every year.

Every year, the CCAO reviews the hundreds of thousands of homes that receive homestead exemptions, looking for evidence that they may not qualify. And every year, the office identifies tens of thousands of them. But for the vast majority of homeowners, there is no reason to think that they are not eligible anymore. If we can validate the eligibility of the exemption without an application, then we save the property owner the difficulty of completing the application. This also reduces the number of homeowners who must file Certificates of Error later in the process.

Before automatic renewal, applicants had to file an application every year, attesting to their eligibility for the exemptions they sought. Whether online or on paper, these applications numbered in the hundreds of thousands, and each form represented the efforts of a single homeowner addressing the questions required of state law.

In addition, many homeowners failed to return applications on time. In those cases, they usually did not realize they were no longer receiving the exemption until they received the second installment tax bill, which lists exemptions received for that tax year.

If they receive the tax bill without the exemption, homeowners can file for a Certificate of Error, which allows them to receive the exemption once they verify eligibility. This means more paperwork (online or on paper), and more time and stress.

This report will summarize efforts at the CCAO to administer four exemptions that are newly subject to automatic renewal: the Senior Citizen Homestead Exemption, the Persons with Disabilities Homestead Exemption, the Veterans with Disabilities Homestead

Exemption for WWII veterans, and the Veterans with Disabilities Homestead Exemption for veterans rated by the US Department of Veterans Affairs as being “permanently and totally disabled.”

The **Senior Citizen Homestead Exemption** is available to homeowners over age 65. The legislature approved automatic renewal, subject to review, in 2019. To qualify, the homeowners must be age 65 or older, the home must be their primary residence, and they must be responsible for the payment of property taxes for the home.

The Senior Citizen Homestead Exemption is the second most common homestead exemption. Over a third of a million homeowners in Cook County are eligible. Depending on the tax rate, the exemption is worth a reduction of \$500 to \$2,000 in the home’s tax bill.

Automatic renewal of the Senior Citizen Homestead Exemption was approved for a pilot with PA 101-453 and took effect with Tax Year 2019. The program became permanent with PA 102-592 in 2024. In the year prior to taking effect, 321,437 people received the exemption, including 32,688 who filed for Certificates of Error.

Tax Year	Auto-Renewals	Required to Reapply	On Time Applications	Certificate of Error Applications	Total Recipients
2022	324,754	10,728	17,162	26,956	357,872
2023	336,650	5,266	12,087	12,181	360,918
2024	351,849	9,069	16,398	6,648	374,896

The CCAO verified that there were no eligibility concerns on an average of 337,000 homes each year, saving hundreds of thousands of seniors from having to reapply.

The CCAO found reason to think that an average of 8,300 homes might no longer be eligible and required them to reapply.

The number of seniors who sought Certificates of Error declined by more than half since the advent of autorenewal.

The number of recipients of the senior exemption grew by approximately 16.6% since 2017. Over the same period, US Census records show that the number of Cook County residents over age 65 grew 17.1%.¹

The **Persons with Disabilities Homestead Exemption** is available to a homeowner for their primary residence if that homeowner is “unable to engage in any substantial gainful activity by reason of a medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.” A person may demonstrate eligibility by presenting “an Illinois Person with a Disability Identification Card stating that the claimant is under a Class 2 disability, as defined in Section 4A of the Illinois Identification Card Act.”

As approved by PA 102-895, beginning with Tax Year 2022, we can automatically renew the exemption if the applicant presents to the CCAO the same proof they would submit to the Secretary of State to obtain a Person with Disability Identification Card for a Class 2 disability. This authority is a pilot program running through Tax Year 2027.

Depending on the tax rate, the Persons with Disabilities exemption is worth a reduction of approximately \$150 to \$500 in the home’s tax bill in Cook County.

Tax Year	Auto-Renewals	Required to Reapply	On Time Applications	Certificate of Error Applications	Total Recipients
2022	N/A	N/A	25,923	5,573	31,496
2023	27,279	4,217	654	4,477	32,410
2024	29,130	3,280	1,909	1,393	32,432

The CCAO verified that there were no eligibility concerns for more than 80% of homes each year, saving more than 27,000 persons with disabilities from having to reapply each year.

The CCAO found reason to think that 7,500 homes over two years might no longer be eligible and asked them to reapply.

¹ Data obtained from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=cook+county+Illinois+population+by+age>

The number of seniors who sought Certificates of Error declined by 4,200 since the advent of autorenewal.

The **Veterans with Disabilities Homestead Exemption** for veterans with a 100% disability rating from the US Department of Veterans Affairs, whose disabilities have been determined to be “permanent and total,” was created by PA 102-895, and took effect with Tax Year 2023. The exemption reduces a homeowner’s property tax bill to zero.

Tax Year	Auto-Renewals	Required to Reapply	On Time Applications	Certificate of Error Applications	Total Recipients
2023	N/A	N/A	2,765	355	3,100
2024	2,850	250	1,755	720	5,325

The CCAO verified that there were no eligibility concerns on approximately four out of five homes, saving thousands of veterans with disabilities deemed permanent and total by the US Department of Veterans Affairs from having to reapply.

The CCAO found reason to think that a few hundred homes might no longer be eligible and asked them to reapply.

Because the exemption was created new without the need to reapply, we cannot compare the number of veterans who filed for Certificates of Error with prior years.

The **Veterans with Disabilities Homestead Exemption for World War II Veterans** was created by PA 103-596, and took effect with Tax Year 2024. The exemption reduces a homeowner’s property tax bill to zero.

Tax Year	Auto-Renewals	Required to Reapply	On Time Applications	Certificate of Error Applications	Total Recipients
2024	N/A	N/A	82	52	134

Because the exemption was created as a new subcategory of veterans with disabilities, we cannot compare the number of veterans who filed for Certificates of Error with prior years.

Glossary

Tax Year: The taxable year for which the exemption was sought or granted.

Auto-Renewals: The number of recipients in the prior year for which there were no flags indicating that they were no longer eligible.

Required to Reapply: The number of recipients in the prior year for which there were flags indicating that they might not be eligible. Possible flags include a title transfer, a death certificate, a change of address form, or a homestead exemption on another property.

On Time Applications: Applications received in time to be included on the tax bill. These include applications from first-time applicants as well as prior-year recipients who were asked to reapply.

Certificate of Error Applications: Applications received after it was too late to include the exemption on the tax bill. These include applications from first-time applicants as well as prior-year recipients who were asked to reapply.

Total Recipients: The total number of properties deemed eligible for the exemption that tax year.

Note: Some of the figures in this report may be subject to revision as the Cook County Assessor's Office processes additional Certificates of Error.