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Representative Jim Whitaker
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Property Tax Exemption Bill Passes **Rep. Whitaker's HB 118 Protects Elderly from Losing Homes**

(JUNEAU) – The House of Representatives today passed a bill to help protect elderly and disabled Alaskans from the risk of losing their municipal property tax exemptions.

State law grants senior citizens, disabled veterans, and certain widows and widowers an exemption from local property taxes on their primary residence. However, state law currently requires citizens who receive this exemption to reapply for it every year, or risk losing it.

Rep. Jim Whitaker (R-Fairbanks) introduced HB 118 to allow municipalities the latitude to waive the need for annual filings, and to let them write their own ordinances for accepting applications that might be more forgiving of the older Alaskans the exemptions are designed to help.

In speaking on the bill from the floor of the House, Whitaker cited the case of Fairbanksan Olive Anderson, an elderly woman who lost her home after forgetting she had to file applications for the exemption from taxes on her home year after year after year.

“When I called the (Fairbanks North Star) borough to ask what the situation was and what can be done, I was told, ‘We can’t do anything because state law requires that she do this,’” Whitaker said. “What this bill does is simply allow local municipalities to determine the procedure by which the tax exemption is filed for. HB 118 is simply the right thing to do.”

While noting that another Fairbanks resident eventually stepped in to pay Ms. Anderson’s taxes and prevent her from being turned out of her home, Whitaker said the state should not be forcing unnecessarily burdensome paperwork requirements on older Alaskans.

The bill passed the House unanimously. It now moves to the Senate for consideration.

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