



SOUTH SUBURBAN MAYORS & MANAGERS ASSOCIATION

September 18, 2024

Alsip
Beecher
Blue Island
Burnham
Calumet City
Calumet Park
Chicago Heights
Country Club Hills
Crestwood
Crete
Dixmoor
Dolton
East Hazel Crest
Flossmoor
Ford Heights
Glenwood
Harvey
Hazel Crest
Homewood
Lansing
Lynwood
Markham
Matteson
Midlothian
Mokena
Monee
Oak Forest
Olympia Fields
Orland Hills
Orland Park
Park Forest
Peotone
Phoenix
Posen
Richton Park
Riverdale
Robbins
Sauk Village
South Chicago Heights
South Holland
Steger
Thornton
Tinley Park
University Park
Worth

TO: COOK COUNTY WORKFORCE, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
FROM: KRISTI DELAURENTIIS, SSMMA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
RE: TESTIMONY TO RESOLUTION 24-4325

Good morning. My name is Kristi DeLaurentiis, I'm the Executive Director of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, known as SSMMA. I'm here today to speak on behalf of 39 of my member municipalities that represent over 700,000 residents within south suburban Cook County, to share our perspective on property tax concerns facing homeowners in our region, following the reassessment of the South Triad last year.

By now you've heard and read of numerous reports of how south suburban homeowners have been saddled with tax bills that have climbed at a rate not seen in nearly 30 years. Across the South Tri, tax bills increased an average of 19.9% this year but within the south suburbs, the increases were much, much more staggering.

Across the board an increase was actually anticipated by SSMMA. Our region was finally coming out from under the applied COVID factor after 3 years, which had repressed values; we knew of the sheer number of residential properties that were sold due to low interest rates and saw all-time-high sales prices realized during the pandemic, which resulted in residential properties being assessed at significantly higher values. What we could not have anticipated is just how dire our predictions were.

Hit hardest were property owners in south suburban municipalities within some of the most resource-strapped and economically distressed communities within the County. Many of these lower-income taxpayers received tax bills that increased over 30% over last year's bill, with residents in predominantly black communities seeing the average tax bill shoot up 72% as in Markham, or 82% in Harvey, and even 122% in the Village of Dixmoor. Clearly this is untenable situation for the residents, especially for taxpayers that were already finding it difficult to pay— as evidenced by annual collection rates that are tracked by Treasurer Pappas' Office. They reported that the south suburbs had 14 of the 15 worst collection rates within Cook County.

And, SSMMA anticipates that the rates are worsening, which is expected to be confirmed as soon as they complete their latest analysis of collection rates.

One clear truth is that homeowners that were struggling to pay a smaller tax bill last year will no doubt face even greater difficulty paying a significantly higher tax bill this year.

We certainly can anticipate this, which affects not only municipalities but all other taxing bodies, including schools. Municipal leaders are hearing directly from their constituents at town hall meeting after town hall meeting throughout the Southland. Residents have come out to not only complain about their tax bills but also to plead for some relief. Hundreds of residents have attended crowded auditoriums and stepped up to microphones to express their panic due to a completely unexpected tax bill that seemingly doubled overnight. They've detailed the financial struggles they face and have spoken of fears of losing the family home if they default on their tax payments.

This is particularly heartbreaking to hear from seniors and hard-working families that have done everything that society expects of them by working to attain a home, struggling to secure equity and working to build generational wealth, investing in that home or even paying off a mortgage only to face a regressive tax burden that threatens their American Dream.

I'm here today on behalf of Southland leaders who have witnessed many of these testimonies, in support of the County's consideration of a property tax relief program for overburdened homeowners. We urge you to explore both short-term relief programs for eligible property owners and long-term remedies that fairly resolve the systemic inequitable conditions that undermine wealth building and de-stabilize communities, particularly within black and brown communities. SSMMA welcomes aiding in this effort in any way we can and stands ready to support a relief program that helps households today and mitigates property tax inequities across the County long term. Thank you and I welcome any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristi DeLaurentiis
SSMMA Executive Director