

Cutting Property Taxes for Seniors and the Disabled in NYC



Introduction

The Senior Citizen Homeowners' Exemption (SCHE) and the Disabled Homeowners Exemption (DHE) are two property tax exemptions that benefit New Yorkers. However, we can do more to ensure that this critical relief is available to more of our seniors and those living with disabilities. This can be accomplished by raising the income threshold to qualify for these exemptions.

The Independent Democratic Conference has long fought for making housing more affordable in the City of New York. In the 2014 state budget, the IDC successfully fought to increase the income limit for the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) from \$29,000 to \$50,000. This increase was made permanent in 2016, thanks again to the efforts of the IDC.

Increasing the income thresholds for SCHE and DHE to match the higher levels we achieved for SCRIE and DRIE has been a priority for the IDC and a part of its policy agenda for several years. The IDC policy proposal for SCHE and DHE is to increase the income caps for the full exemption allowed, which is 50 percent of assessed value, by 58 percent from their current level of \$29,000 to \$50,000. The levels at which a partial exemption from the assessed value can be claimed would increase from its current maximum of \$37,399 to a new cap of \$58,400.

On April 26th, 2017, Mayor de Blasio announced his support for the IDC proposal, as laid out in Senate Bill S.4628-A. With this support, and the additional money that the city is proposing to add to its FY 2018 budget, this proposal is close to becoming a reality for seniors and persons living with a disability in the City of New York. The IDC plan will:

SCHE Expansion DHE Expansion Expand the income threshold for the full Expand the income threshold for the full 50% exemption from \$29,000 to \$50,000 50% exemption from \$29,000 to \$50,000 Raise the maximum income threshold for a Raise the maximum income threshold for a partial exemption from \$37,399 to \$58,400 partial exemption from \$37,399 to \$58,400 Allow 29,000 additional seniors to qualify Allow 3,400 additional New Yorkers for SCHE living with a disability to qualify for DHE Save the average New Yorker living with a Save the average senior \$1,750 per year on disability \$1,750 per year on their tax bill their tax bill

Background on SCHE and DHE

SCHE was first enacted in 1966 with a maximum income cap of \$3,000 in income over a 12-month period. This would equal approximately \$22,776 in 2017 dollars. DHE was first enacted in 1997 with a maximum income cap of \$18,500. This would equal approximately \$28,162 in 2017 dollars.

The last time SCHE was increased was in 2006. At that time, SCHE's cap was raised from \$24,000 to its current level of \$29,000 (phased in over a three-year period, with an increase to \$27,000 in 2007, \$28,000 in 2008, and \$29,000 in 2009). The last time DHE was increased was in 2006 as well. DHE's income cap was increased from \$24,000 to its current level of \$29,000 (phased in over a four-year period, with an increase to \$26,000 in 2006, \$27,000 in 2007, \$28,000 in 2008, and \$29,000 in 2009).

What is clear is that it is high time to increase SCHE and DHE for homeowners in the City of New York. The cost of living has risen and continues to rise, and these tax abatements must account for this. Furthermore, it is also clear many more New Yorkers could benefit from these exemptions. It is time to expand these exemptions to include these additional New Yorkers.

How SCHE and DHE Work

The SCHE and DHE tax exemptions may be enacted by any local government (including any county, municipal government, or school district) through passage of a local law. However, once a municipality grants the SCHE or DHE exemption, they cannot be rescinded.vii

The income caps of both SCHE and DHE are only a ceiling, not a required level. In other words, a local government may set their income cap at a level less than \$29,000 (but no lower than \$3,000). These income levels are set by law at the state level, and in order to change requires the passage of legislation in Albany.

The City of New York currently offers both the SCHE and DHE exemptions, up to a maximum income of \$37,399.viii Under the proposed legislation, SCHE and DHE will now be available at its highest level for those making up to \$50,000.ix It will also be available at certain levels for those making up to \$58,400 a year.x The current structure of SCHE and DHE in the City of New York and the new legislation are described in the following sections.

Who Qualifies for SCHE and DHE?

SCHE and DHE are available to qualified homeowners in one-, two-, and three-family residences, condominiums, or co-ops.xi Currently, homeowners 65 and older with a combined annual household income of \$37,399 or less qualify for SCHE.xii People over 65 with a combined annual household income of \$58,400 or less would qualify for SCHE under the new proposal.xiii Qualifying homeowners must own their property for at least 12 consecutive months prior to applying. It must be the primary residence of the individual applying as well as all other owners.xiv

Likewise, homeowners living with a disability with a combined annual household income of \$37,399 or less qualify for DHE.xv Persons living with a disability with a combined annual household income of \$58,400 or less would qualify for DHE under the new proposal.xvi The individual seeking the DHE exemption must have a physical or mental impairment (not due to current use of alcohol or illegal drug use) that substantially limits that person's ability to engage in one or more major life activities. The property must be the legal residence of the disabled person and must be occupied by that person unless he or she is absent from the property while receiving health-related services at an in-patient of a residential health care facility. The property also must be used exclusively for residential purposes. If a portion of the property is used for other than residential purposes, the exemption will apply only to the portion that is used exclusively for residential purposes.xvii

How to Apply for SCHE and DHE

To apply for SCHE, DHE, and other tax exemptions available to residents of the City of New York, a homeowner must complete a homeowner tax benefit initial application. The form will help homeowners determine if they qualify for either the SCHE or the DHE program. The form and all required materials must be postmarked by March 15, 2018 in order to qualify for the 2018-19 tax year. Application forms should be submitted to the New York City Department of Finance, P.O. Box 311, Maplewood, NJ 07040-0311. The application form is available on the City of New York's website at the following web address: http://www1.nyc.gov/site/finance/benefits/property-benefit-forms/benefits-forms-property-owners.page

Cost of SCHE/DHE

Under the current structure, the city provides 52,787 SCHE exemptions and 4,940 DHE exemptions at a total cost of \$142.8 million.xix Once again, the city estimates under the proposed expansion, approximately 29,000 new households will become eligible for SCHE and 3,400 for DHE.xx About 30% of qualifying households are expected to take advantage of the expanded SCHE and DHE programs.xxi The New York City Comptroller's Office estimates the cost to New York City of the expansion would be \$61.6 million annually.xxii

Seniors in New York City

According to U.S. Census data collected between 2011 and 2015, approximately 1,071,705 residents of New York City were aged 65 and older.xxiii Seniors in this age bracket represent 13% of the total New York City population. The New York City Department of Planning projects that by the year 2020, the population of those aged 65 and older will reach 1,177,215 – a growth of approximately 175,000 (17.5%) since the 2010 Census.xxiv In 2015, in the City of New York as a whole, the median household income for seniors 65 years of age and older was \$33,917.xxv

Persons Living with a Disability in New York City

According to a report compiled by the Center for Independence of the Disabled, in 2011, Americans with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 64 numbered 441,598 in all of New York City.xxvi This accounts for approximately 5% of the total New York City population. It is important, for our purposes, to examine the 18 to 64 age demographic specifically because 18 is a minimum base age that someone can reasonably expected to be a homeowner and the DHE Program does not apply to those 65 years of age and older because they would be granted an exemption under the SCHE Program based on current law.

According to Cornell University, in 2015 the median household income for persons with disabilities in New York State was \$41,700.xxvii According to Baruch College, New York State's median household income was \$60,850 in 2015.xxviii The City's was \$55,752 (about 8.4% below the state figure).xxix This means it can be approximated that the median household income for disabled New Yorkers can be assumed to be \$38,197, about 8.4% below the state's median income level.xxx

Borough	Senior Population _{xxxi}	Percent of Total	Disabled Population 18-	Percent of Total Borough
	1 opulationxxx	Population	64 _{xxxii}	Population Population
Brooklyn	309,263	12%	125,583	5%
Bronx	157,995	11%	105,955	7%
Manhattan	230,155	14%	79,929	5%
Queens	307,903	13%	104,932	5%
Staten Island	66,389	14%	25,199	5%

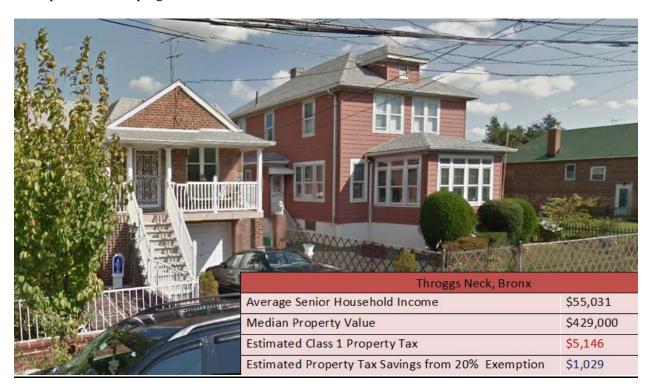
Who Will Benefit from expanding SCHE and DHE?

There are 57,000 New Yorkers currently enrolled in SCHE or DHE.xxxiii This new proposal would allow an additional 32,400 households to qualify.xxxiv This means approximately 29,000 new households will become eligible for SCHE and 3,400 for DHE.xxxv The average benefit to qualifying homeowners will be approximately \$1,750 per year.xxxvi This increase in SCHE and DHE will benefit people across all five

boroughs. As an example, here are the savings the average senior New Yorker living with a disability stands to gain in several major New York City neighborhoods:

Throggs Neck/East Bronx

In Throggs Neck, the average senior has a median household income of \$55,031 xxxviii and a median property value of \$429,000.xxxviii Seniors in the East Bronx pay \$5,146 per year in property taxes before abatements.xxxix Given this profile, the average senior in Throggs Neck stands to save \$1,029 per year under the expanded SCHE program.xl



Washington Heights/Northwest Manhattan

In Washington Heights, the average senior living in a co-op has a median household income of \$45,214xli and a median property value of \$519,000.xlii For a co-op, which is considered a "Class 2" property, and therefore assessed differently, an average tax bill per unit may total around \$4,500. Given this profile, the average senior living in a co-op in Washington Heights stands to save \$2,250 per year under the expanded SCHE program.xliii

Port Richmond/Northern Staten Island

In Port Richmond, the average senior has a median household income of \$54,400xliv and a median property value of about \$369,000.xlv Seniors in Port Richmond pay \$4,426 per year in property taxes before abatements.xlvi Given this profile, the average senior in Port Richmond stands to save \$1106 per year under the expanded SCHE program.xlvii

Crown Heights/Central Brooklyn

In Crown Heights, the average senior has a median household income of \$44,961xIviii and a median property value of \$939,900.xIix Seniors in East Brooklyn pay \$11,274 per year in property taxes before abatements.1 Given this profile, the average senior in Crown Heights stands to save \$5,637 per year under the expanded SCHE program.Ii

Whitestone/Northeast Queens

In Whitestone, the average senior has a median household income of \$52,171 lii and a median property value of \$790,900.liii Seniors in Northeast Queens pay \$9,487 per year in property taxes before abatements.liv Given this profile, the average senior in Whitestone stands to save \$3,320 per year under the expanded SCHE program.lv

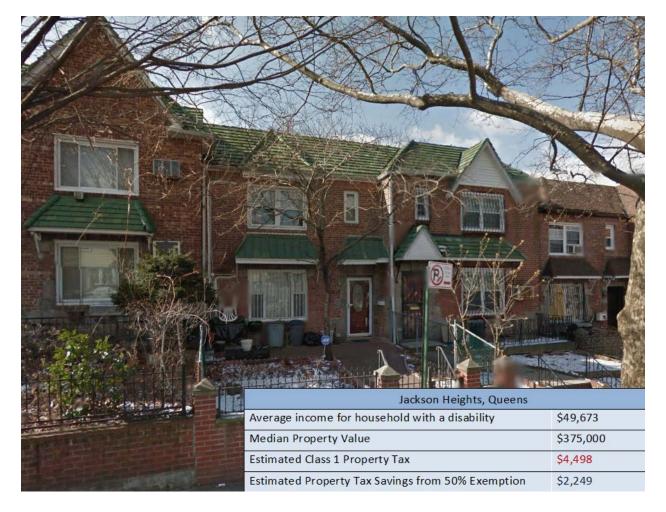


Corona/Elmhurst/Central Queens

The average senior living in Corona or Elmhurst has a median household income of \$45,321 wi and a median property value of \$328,000. Wii Seniors in Central Queens pay \$3,934 per year in property taxes before abatements. Wiii Given this profile, the average senior in Woodside stands to save \$1,967 per year under the expanded SCHE program. Iix

Jackson Heights/Central Queens

The average resident of Jackson Heights living with a disability has a median household income of \$49,673.lx The median property value of a class I property in Central Queens is \$375,000.lxi The average resident of Queens living in a class I property pays \$4,498 per year in property taxes.lxii This means persons living with disabilities in Jackson Heights should save approximately \$2,249 per year under the expanded DHE program.lxiii



Sheepshead Bay/Southeast Brooklyn

The average resident of Sheepshead Bay living with a disability has a median household income of \$52,783.lxiv The median property value of a class I property in Southern Brooklyn is \$628,800.lxv The average resident of Southern Brooklyn living in a class I property pays \$7,542 per year in property taxes.lxvi This means persons living with disabilities in Sheepshead Bay should save approximately \$2,640 per year under the expanded DHE program.lxvii

Conclusion

In a time when costs in New York City are soaring, it is more critical than ever that we do more to ease the tax burden on those populations like seniors and the disability community that are living on a fixed-income. The Independent Democratic Conference has been advocating for the expansion of SCHE and DHE for several years in order to provide these vulnerable New Yorkers with some much-needed relief. The IDC applauds Mayor de Blasio for including this expansion for the residents of New York City in his 2017 Executive budget proposal, and we will work tirelessly to ensure that Albany plays its part by passing the legislation needed to give New York City the ability to implement this exemption expansion.

Appendix:

Current Structure of SCHE and DHE

SCHE and DHE both presently follow a sliding scale of qualifying income brackets. As income rises, the amount of the available tax abatement decreases. The current structure is as follows: |xviii

SCHE/DHE at \$29,000 (Current)			
Income Range	Abatement		
\$36,000 - \$37,400	5%		
\$35,600 - \$36,499	10.0%		
\$34,700 - \$35,599	15.0%		
\$33,800 - \$34,699	20.0%		
\$32,900 - \$33,799	25.0%		
\$32,000 - \$32,899	30.0%		
\$31,000 - \$31,999	35.0%		
\$30,000 - \$30,999	40.0%		
\$29,001 - \$29,999	45.0%		
\$0 - \$29,000	50.0%		

SCHE and DHE Under the Proposed Increase

The IDC and Mayor de Blasio have proposed a new structure for SCHE and DHE that would increase the base level income to qualify for SCHE and DHE to \$50,000 and the top level to \$58,400. Ixix The new sliding scale would look something like this: Ixx

SCHE/DHE at \$50,000 (Proposed)			
Income Range	Abatement		
\$57,500 - \$58,400	5%		
\$56,600 - \$57,499	10.0%		
\$55,700 - \$56,599	15.0%		
\$54,800 - \$55,699	20.0%		
\$53,900 - \$54,799	25.0%		
\$53,000 - \$53,899	30.0%		
\$52,000 - \$52,999	35.0%		
\$50,100 - \$51,999	40.0%		
\$50,001 - \$50,999	45.0%		
\$0 - \$50,000	50.0%		

Endnotes:

- i Chapter 616 of the laws of 1966
- # Calculated based on the rate of inflation using the BLS calculator at https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl
- iii Chapter 315 of the laws of 1997
- w Calculated based on the rate of inflation using the BLS calculator at https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl
- v Chapter 186 of the laws of 2006
- vi Chapter 187 of the laws of 2006
- NYS Dept. of Taxation & Finance. For SCHE: https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/seniorexempt.htm
 For DHE: https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/disablexempt.htm
- NYS Dept. of Taxation & Finance. For SCHE: https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/seniorexempt.htm
 For DHE: https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/disablexempt.htm
- ix Press release from the Office of the Mayor: http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/273-17/mayor-de-blasio-elected-officials-push-expand-property-tax-relief-more-seniors-and
- x Press release from the Office of the Mayor: http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/273-17/mayor-de-blasio-elected-officials-push-expand-property-tax-relief-more-seniors-and
- xi Press release from the Office of the Mayor: http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/273-17/mayor-de-blasio-elected-officials-push-expand-property-tax-relief-more-seniors-and
- xii https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/seniorexempt.htm
- riii Press release from the Office of the Mayor: http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/273-17/mayor-de-blasio-elected-officials-push-expand-property-tax-relief-more-seniors-and
- xiv https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/seniorexempt.htm
- xv https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/disablexempt.htm
- xvi Press release from the Office of the Mayor: http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/273-17/mayor-de-blasio-elected-officials-push-expand-property-tax-relief-more-seniors-and
- xvii https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/disablexempt.htm
- xviii NYC Dept. of Finance. http://www1.nyc.gov/site/finance/benefits/property-benefit-forms/benefits-forms-property-owners.page
- xix Provided by the NYC Office of the Comptroller
- xx Provided by the NYC Office of the comptroller, also see press release from the Office of the Mayor:
- http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/273-17/mayor-de-blasio-elected-officials-push-expand-property-tax-relief-more-seniors-and
- xxi Provided by the NYC Office of the Comptroller
- xxii http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/sum4-17.pdf
- xxiii https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-
- content/uploads/documents/Aging with Dignity A Blueprint for Serving NYC Growing Senior Population.pdf wiv https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-
- content/uploads/documents/Aging with Dignity A Blueprint for Serving NYC Growing Senior Population.pdf
- xxv http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/nycdata/income-taxes/med hhold income-age.htm
- xxvi http://www.cidny.org/resources/News/Reports/Disability%20Matters.pdf
- xxvii https://www.disabilitystatistics.org/reports/acs.cfm?statistic=6
- xxviii http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/nycdata/income-taxes/med hhold income.htm
- xxix http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/nycdata/income-taxes/med hhold income.htm
- xxx Calculated by finding statewide median income for New Yorkers living with disabilities as a percentage of statewide median household income, and applying that percentage to NYC median income.
- xxxi http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/nycdata/population-geography/age_distribution.htm
- xxxii http://www.cidny.org/resources/News/Reports/Disability%20Matters.pdf
- xxxiii Provided by the NYC Office of the Comptroller
- xxxiv Press release from the Office of the Mayor: http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/273-17/mayor-de-blasio-elected-officials-push-expand-property-tax-relief-more-seniors-and
- xxxv Provided by the NYC Office of the Comptroller

xxxvi Press release from the Office of the Mayor: http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/273-17/mayor-

<u>de-blasio-elected-officials-push-expand-property-tax-relief-more-seniors-and</u>

http://furmancenter.org/files/sotc/NYUFurmanCenter SOCin 2015 4MAY2016 (Throgsneck Coop City)81.pdf

xxxviii https://www.zillow.com/throggs-neck-new-york-ny/home-values/

xxxix Calculated using NYC tax figures found at

https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/finance/downloads/pdf/brochures/class_1_guide.pdf

xi Calculated based on estimated proposed exemption level under expanded SCHE/DHE found in appendix

xiihttp://furmancenter.org/files/sotc/NYUFurmanCenter_SOCin_2015_4MAY2016_(Washington_Hghts_Inwood)12 1.pdf

xiiihttps://www.rebny.com/content/dam/rebny/Documents/PDF/News/Research/NYC%20Residential%20Sales/REBNY_1Q_2017_Residential_Sales_Report.pdf?

xiiii Calculated based on estimated proposed exemption level under expanded SCHE/DHE found in appendix

xiv http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Port-Richmond-Staten-Island-NY.html

vlv

https://www.rebny.com/content/dam/rebny/Documents/PDF/News/Research/NYC%20Residential%20Sales/REBN Y 1Q 2017 Residential Sales Report.pdf

xlvi Calculated using NYC tax figures found at

https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/finance/downloads/pdf/brochures/class 1 guide.pdf

xivii Calculated based on estimated proposed exemption level under expanded SCHE/DHE found in appendix

xiviiihttp://furmancenter.org/files/sotc/NYUFurmanCenter SOCin 2015 4MAY2016 (Crown Heights Prospect Heights)95.pdf

xlix https://www.zillow.com/crown-heights-new-york-ny/home-values/

Calculated using NYC tax figures found at found in appendix

https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/finance/downloads/pdf/brochures/class 1 guide.pdf

□ Calculated based on estimated proposed exemption level under expanded SCHE/DHE found in appendix

iii http://furmancenter.org/files/sotc/NYUFurmanCenter SOCin 2015 4MAY2016 (Flushing Whitestone)132.pdf

https://www.zillow.com/whitestone-new-york-ny/home-values/

liv Calculated using NYC tax figures found at

https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/finance/downloads/pdf/brochures/class 1 guide.pdf

v Calculated based on estimated proposed exemption level under expanded SCHE/DHE found in appendix

wi http://furmancenter.org/files/sotc/NYUFurmanCenter SOCin 2015 4MAY2016 (Elmhurst Corona)129.pdf

wii http://furmancenter.org/files/sotc/NYUFurmanCenter SOCin 2015 4MAY2016 (Elmhurst Corona)129.pdf

Iviii Calculated using NYC tax figures found at

https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/finance/downloads/pdf/brochures/class 1 guide.pdf

iix Calculated based on estimated proposed exemption level under expanded SCHE/DHE found in appendix

kk http://furmancenter.org/files/sotc/NYUFurmanCenter SOCin 2015 4MAY2016 (Jackson Hghts)128.pdf

ki https://www.zillow.com/jackson-heights-new-york-ny/home-values/

Ixii Calculated using NYC tax figures found at

https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/finance/downloads/pdf/brochures/class 1 guide.pdf

kiii Calculated based on estimated proposed exemption level under expanded SCHE/DHE found in appendix

http://furmancenter.org/files/sotc/NYUFurmanCenter SOCin 2015 4MAY2016 (Sheepshead Bay)102.pdf

https://www.zillow.com/sheepshead-bay-new-york-ny/home-values/

lxvi Calculated using NYC tax figures found at

https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/finance/downloads/pdf/brochures/class 1 guide.pdf

kavii Calculated based on estimated proposed exemption level under expanded SCHE/DHE found in appendix kaviii NYS Dept. of Taxation & Finance. For SCHE:

https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/seniorexempt.htm For DHE:

https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/disablexempt.htm

kix Press release from the Office of the Mayor: http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/273-17/mayor-de-blasio-elected-officials-push-expand-property-tax-relief-more-seniors-and

Estimated based upon proposed \$50,000 and \$58,400 levels. Final income brackets have yet to be released, but these numbers track to current SCHE/DHE brackets increased to match the proposed caps.