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Low-Income Advocates Urge City Flexibility on New Property Tax Programs

May 24, 2014 4:38 AM

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(Jennifer Schultz, of Community Legal Services of Philadelphia, testifies before City Council's Finance Committee. Image from City of Phila. TV)

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Mike Dunn
Mike Dunn is City Hall bureau chief for KYW Newsradio 1060. He covers... [Read More](#)

By Mike Dunn

PHILADELPHIA (CBS) — A Philadelphia City Council administration to give homeowners a new property tax system.

At the hearing, Jennifer Schultz of [Community Legal Services](#) testified that the new assessment system known as "AVI" (Actual Value Initiative, [see related story](#)) left many homeowners confused and scared.

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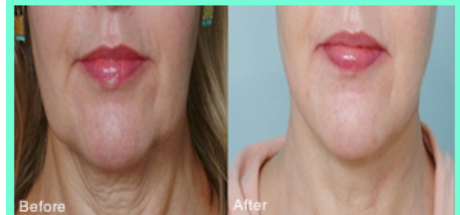


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"The AVI [program](#) provided an unanticipated shock to many homeowners in Philadelphia when they received their 2014 tax bill," she said.

Adding to the confusion, she said, was that the new assessments mailed out gave only the assessments, not the tax due, because the rate had not been set at the time.

"So it really was an abstract idea to see these changes in these numbers, because it was a moving target when the notices were [going out](#)," Schultz testified.

Complicating things further were brand-new relief [programs](#) with differing requirements and differing deadlines.

They included the Homestead Exemption ([related story](#)), a program for low-income seniors, and a program called "LOOP," aimed at gentrification relief ([related story](#)).

Kelly Gastley (below) of the group [Philadelphia VIP](#) — a low-income legal [services](#) agency — testified that the newness of the programs made missed deadlines more likely.

"The reality right now is that this is still very new information and new programs for our clients," she said. "We need to make sure that we give the city the discretion it needs to allow folks to get into these relief programs when they have missed the deadline."

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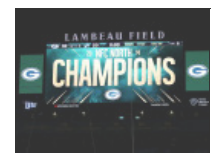
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(Kelly Gastley of Philadelphia VIP testifies. Image from City of Phila. TV)

So, the [Finance](#) Committee of Philadelphia City Council approved a measure authored by Councilwoman Maria Quiñones-Sánchez that gives the Nutter administration more latitude with deadlines for property tax relief programs.

Gastley said this leniency helps not only the property owners, but the city as well.

"It's really important that we get these taxpayers into plans and paying their real estate taxes on time every year, so that we're not draining the city's [resources](#) of collection and enforcement in future years," she said.

The measure now goes to the full Council for a vote, most likely next month. A spokesman for the

mayor says the Nutter administration supports the measure.

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