



Tax collectors say lawmakers force them to waste public money

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Tax Collectors in Florida says a legislative mandate forcing them to publish a list of delinquent taxpayers forces their offices to waste public money.

Tampa, Florida-- When someone doesn't pay their mortgage or property taxes their home can be sold on the courthouse steps. Either way it is not pleasant.

We were at the Pasco Court House as a woman's home was sold by the clerk and all she could say was she was shaking, literally shaking.

After the clerk sold the woman's property she was not only out of luck, she is out of her home. She was going to be evicted in 24 hours and if she didn't get out the Sheriff was going to put her possessions on the curb.

Every county in the state has to publish a list of delinquent tax payers. It is intended to keep people from being thrown out of their homes for not paying property taxes. The legislature requires every county in the state to publish the list for three consecutive weeks each year.

When asked, Hillsborough Tax Collector Doug Belden, if it is necessary and he told us absolutely not. Belden is the former president of the state tax collectors association. Belden says the publication is a waste of tax payer dollars.

According to Belden, over the years the tax collectors association has attempted to get the legislature to eliminate the delinquency advertising or at least reduce it.

Belden points to the fact that the tax list is available free and on-line, but he says the list cost Hillsborough taxpayers \$122,000 this year. He says it is a big money maker for some newspapers.

He says that in the smaller counties it is a big thing. Belden says the tax collectors have to go up against the newspaper lobbyists and they've been defeated every year.

However Jack Cory from the Keep the Public Noticed Coalition, which is supported by the Florida Press Association, says Belden is off base and on a witch hunt.

According to Cory, if he doesn't think the 57 percent of the senior citizens that don't have access to

internet don't have the right to know their property is going to be sold at a tax sale, then Belden needs to talk to them. Cory says Belden is looking for some kind of boogeyman.

And while those who favor the three time publication insist it is to alert what they call "little old ladies" who might lose their home to foreclosure because they haven't paid their property taxes, the county says that's just not a valid argument. That's because a homesteaded piece of property that is about to go into foreclosure gets a visit from someone from the tax collectors office, gets a certified letter and the Sheriff's Office posts a notice on the property. Belden says that makes the publication a waste of time and money. When we told taxpayers like Marvin Lindsey what the county is paying for the publication he couldn't believe it. He said if the information is on line, it is absurd that taxpayers have to pay to put it in the paper. However it is an absurdity mandated by law.

While the tax collector can recoup the advertising cost from the buyer of a property that is sold at foreclosure, Belden says that happens way down the road and places an undue burden on taxpayers. Meantime, Pinellas County spent \$20,000 on its newspaper insert; the \$122,000 fee for Hillsborough was the lowest bid for the project.

Mike Deeson, 10 Connects