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New tax system needed

In a few days, Cook County property owners will receive their tax bills. Unfortunately, property taxes will rise throughout the county, with Chicago property owners being hit hardest. Chicago homeowners will see their bill increase by 13 percent on average while owners of commercial and industrial properties will be hit with an average 10 percent hike.

While the Chicago property tax increases are primarily a result of the tax hike passed last year, it exposes a fundamental flaw with the way that we fund needed government services, especially education.

To truly improve our schools, we must lift the primary burden from the shoulders of property owners and replace Illinois' flat income tax with a graduated one, which restores fairness to our tax code. Illinois is one of only eight states with a flat income tax, while more than 30 have a graduated income tax.

Because we rely on a regressive tax — property taxes — to fund public schools, school districts in areas rich and poor find it increasingly difficult to raise the money they

need, and property owners — often financially strapped themselves — are made first in line to pony up the cash. Every child deserves a fully funded education. It is unfair to make homeowners in lower-income communities bear the same burden as those in more affluent areas, but that's what's happening under the current system where per pupil spending can nearly triple from one school district to another. This inequity is unfair and immoral.

Obviously the financial challenges Chicago, suburban Cook County and other areas face throughout the state are enormous. That is why I have also repeatedly called for government efficiencies, eliminating corruption that eats away so many of our tax dollars as well as a sensible tax system.

Illinois residents face many challenges. Our state continues to operate without a budget and without needed school and pension reforms. Government must be bold, transparent and accountable, and it must reimagine our taxing system to help address these needs.

David Orr, Cook County clerk