

Testimony to Senate Government Operations Committee regarding H.480

April 19, 2023

Presented by: Richard Vincent, Hartford, VT

Assessor for Town of Hartford. Started April 3. First time as Assessor in VT. Twenty three years experience as Assessor in New Hampshire, and I have performed Assessment work in several other states over the past 30 years.

Please note that my testimony is my own opinion. I am not speaking as a representative for the Town of Hartford. My testimony does not represent my employer's opinions. And, I do not have an opinion on the bill, but am here to share my experiences.

Having just started in Hartford on April 3, I am new to this bill but have read it and have some thoughts. I will briefly discuss what the State of New Hampshire did to resolve similar issues.

NH was in a similar situation in the late 1990's with its assessing practices. At that time the State Department of Rev Admin (or DRA) performed the vast majority of general assessing and revaluation services in the state. In the late 90's, there was an education lawsuit brought against the State. An outcome of the education lawsuit was for the Court to recommend changes in assessing practices. The State was given more supervisory duties to ensure proper assessing practices were employed by the municipalities. As a result, the general Assessing and revaluation duties were taken away from the State. This was done to avoid having the DRA be both the Supervisor and the practitioner of assessing practices.

While N.H. was implementing these changes, the State of Vermont had employed Almy, Gloudehans, Jacobs & Denne to perform a Study of Equalization Procedures. This report was published in July, 1999. The report recommends implementation of many corrective procedures, many of which are already in practice in many other states. In fact, the State of N.H. enacted many of the same corrective procedures in the late 1990's and early 2000's.

Every municipality in New Hampshire is now on a five-year revaluation cycle. If, for any reason, a municipality decides not to conduct a revaluation in its fifth year, the DRA can petition the Board of Tax and Land Appeals (State Appellate Board) to order a revaluation. The BTLA can then hire an assessing firm to perform a revaluation and bill the municipality for the expense.

Also,

Most states outside New England Assess and Revalue at the County level. However, in New England, this work is conducted at the municipal level. This may be because the County governments have little to no power in New England. There are few states that employ centralized valuations, except for Utility valuations.

Issues with centralizing revaluations at the State Level

Pros

More efficient and cost-effective system
Wider base of sales data for analysis

Cons

Re-write of state statutes
Potential large cost to implement
Conflicts with having the same agency be the Supervisor and practitioner
Need to hire many professionals, while there is already a severe shortage of professionals.

Closing

I would recommend reading the July 1999 Study of Equalization Procedures, if not already familiar with the report, before making a decision on this bill. Also, I would suggest that it might be worthwhile to study what the State of New Hampshire has done.

Thank you,

Rick Vincent