



115 STATE STREET  
MONTPELIER, VT 05633-5201

**THOMAS I. CHITTENDEN**  
VERMONT STATE SENATOR

PHONE: (802) 233-1913  
TCHITTENDEN@STATE.VT.US



April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022

Dear Honorable Members of the House Transportation Committee,

This testimony is offered in relation to section 17 of Draft No. 1.2 of H. 736 relating to a study committee for the governance of the Burlington International Airport.

The Burlington International Airport, located entirely in the City of South Burlington with flight paths directly impacting the town of Williston and the City of Winooski, is a critical part of our Vermont economy and transportation infrastructure. The airspace used by this state and federally funded asset is not owned by any single municipality and multiple issues over the last 15 years have highlighted the need for the state to consider (again) governance configurations for this public asset.

Governance of this airport has been a recurring topic over the last four decades with gradual efforts reforming the oversight of this entirely state and federally funded public asset. In 1985, Governor Kunin charged a ‘Burlington Airport Study Group’<sup>1</sup> which resulted in the creation of the Airport Enterprise Fund and Airport Commission to separate the financial activities of the airport from the City of Burlington. More recently in 2013 an Airport Strategic Planning Committee<sup>2</sup> recommended to the Burlington City Council that BIA “**concurrently work with the State and other potential regional partners to explore a regional authority model to be implemented...**” Section 17 of H. 736 puts forward a reasonable & thoughtful path called for by community leaders to consider possible recalibrations of governance for this critical transportation hub.

The current airport commission has representation from the City of Burlington, the City of South Burlington and (just recently) the City of Winooski. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Winooski have testified and spoken in support of the language proposed in H. 736 to study governance configurations; as has the Chair and Vice Chair of the South Burlington City Council. Compelling testimony in support of this language was also heard from Brian Searles, a former BIA Aviation Director and Vermont State Secretary of Transportation.

In the summer of 2021 at the end of long drawn out contested termination of the BIA Aviation Director Gene Richards, the president of the Burlington City Council concluded the hearing stating that the “processes in the city are broken and have let everyone down.” During testimony in the Senate on this language, a current Airport Commissioner testified to the shortcomings evidenced in the current governance model. The state serves an important role to shepherd and steward the oversight of this public asset that uses our public airspace to generate all of its revenues.

Sincerely,

---

Thomas Chittenden  
State Senator  
Chittenden County Senate District  
m. 802.233.1913

---

<sup>1</sup> Chaired by Susan C. Crampton, Thomas M. Crowley and David A. Kaufman.

<sup>2</sup> BIA Airport Strategic Planning Committee Members: Karen Paul (Co Chair, Burlington City Council), Paul Sisson (Co-Chair, City of Burlington), Joseph McNeil (Secretary, Partner at McNeil, Leddy & Sheahan, PC), Ed Colodny (Former CEO, US Airways), Louise Stoll PhD (Former Assistant Secretary & CFO US Department of Transportation), Ann Beland (General Manager, JetBlue Airways), Ernie Pomerleau (President & CEO, Pomerleau Real Estate), Jeff Schulman (Airport Commissioner), Jane Knodell (Burlington City Council), Michael O’Brien (Mayor, City of Winooski), Vince Dober (Burlington City Council), Pam Mackenzie (South Burlington City Council)