

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I am here as a representative of the Vermont Assessors and Listers Association (VALA) where I am currently the Membership and Education Coordinator. I have been in the assessment industry for the past 15 years, and I am currently an Assessor and Lister for multiple towns throughout Vermont.

I am here to express significant concerns regarding the proposed implementation of Regional Assessment Districts (RADs).

VALA feels it is crucial to share the challenges and unanswered questions that this proposal presents.

Premature Implementation

First and foremost, this plan is being set in motion without adequate stakeholder input or sufficient planning. The Department of Taxes, Property Valuation and Review division (PVR) is currently understaffed to lead such a large-scale transformation. This is truly a case of putting the cart before the horse, and moving forward too quickly risks undermining the entire system.

The Central Concern: Cost

The most pressing, and yet to be answered, question is cost. While cost estimates have been offered, no solid estimates have been provided during the legislative process, except for the data offered during testimony from representatives of the vendors who work in this industry. Their testimony about the actual costs of performing the reappraisals as planned has been ignored. There are also questions about how this transition will be funded. The fiscal note does not include realistic numbers, and without state support, the burden will fall on municipal budgets. Transitioning into a 6-year cycle for reappraisals utilizing Regional Assessment Districts will undoubtedly increase costs dramatically, possibly doubling or tripling costs.

Unintended Consequences

There are several unintended consequences we must consider:

- The shortage of qualified appraisers may worsen.
- Municipalities may face backlogs and processing delays.

- There is a very real potential for inflated contract pricing.
- There have been no assurances that a more frequent reappraisal schedule will yield better or fairer outcomes.

Operational and Logistical Gaps

Managing twelve new assessment districts with different software systems across towns is a logistical challenge. There is no clarity on who will coordinate contractors or ensure consistent quality. Furthermore, conflicting ownership dates in Assessment and Homesteads—January 1 vs. April 1—add confusion and need to be resolved.

Equity and Administrative Burden

The proposed system risks creating inequities in parcel classification and valuation. Additionally, the administrative burden for homestead filings will increase significantly. If municipal employees are responsible, why should municipal taxes go up to support a function that supports state education funding?

Threat to Public Trust

These sweeping changes, if implemented too quickly, risk eroding public trust in the assessment process. There is also a need for checks and balances if the state is managing its own Grand List.

Recommendations

To move forward responsibly, I urge the committee to:

- Establish a working group immediately, composed of municipal leaders, appraisers, PVR staff, and legislators, before enacting legislation with so many potential issues.
- Phase in a RAD system gradually, rather than in just two years.
- Prioritize strengthening the existing PVR system.
- Clearly define and assign costs to the state, not to municipalities.
- Resolve language inconsistencies and provide clear definitions regarding assessment ownership dates and classifications.

Closing

In closing, the current draft of this bill raises more questions than it answers. It is not ready for implementation in its current form. We must slow down, gather input, and approach this with the care and thoughtfulness that such a foundational change demands.

Finally, just because we *can* do something doesn't necessarily mean we *should*.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Mimi Burstein

Vermont Master Property Assessor, IV