

Thank you for taking the time to come here today

My name is Rep. Laura Sibilgia from Dover.

I am speaking today on behalf of the Rural Caucus leadership and members. Our group is bipartisan. We are here to represent rural Vermonters and to bring your voices into the work of this building.

What we are seeing right now are Vermonters realizing how significant the changes in Act 181 are and asking why they were not part of the conversation earlier.

It is understandable that people are angry.

A lot of Vermonters are worried they are going to lose control of their land. That fear is real, and it is something we in the Legislature must address directly.

Act 181 was a large and complex bill. Over 170 pages. It combined many housing, conservation, and historic land use changes that will shape Vermont for decades.

And it reflected two things happening at once. A real need to create more housing, and also, a significant increase in how land use would be regulated in rural Vermont in order to protect species and habitats.

When Act 181 was passed in 2024, members of the Rural Caucus proposed and secured a number of amendments to address some of the more onerous aspects of the law.

Over the past year, the Rural Caucus has repeatedly asked agencies, regional planning commissions, and municipal leaders how outreach was happening and what information we could share with our constituents.

It is clear there was no single entity responsible for making sure Vermonters understood all that Act 181 does.

When legislation affects your land, you should be notified directly.

Coming into this session, members of the Rural Caucus believed it was important to slow things down so our constituents could be fully informed before implementation. We proposed H.730 to delay parts of implementation, including the road rule. We proposed direct notice to landowners. And we proposed guidance so local officials could understand how these changes might affect land values.

In the House, members of the committee of jurisdiction were told by their chair that there would be no changes to Act 181 this year.

In the Senate, the chair of that committee came and met with the Rural Caucus and asked what we were hearing. While the Senate did not include our proposals on notice and valuation in S.325, they did include and actually significantly extended the timelines we proposed.

Right now, S.325 is the only proposal to delay the road rule and Tier 3 changes scheduled to take effect this summer. If it advances, there will be more work to do in the House, and your input will be important.

Rural Caucus members understand that the landscape is changing. That the weather is changing. Protecting species habitat matters.

And we know rural Vermonters depend on that habitat too.

The legislature will not get conservation right without the people who live on and care for this land every day.

We have also been clear. If we are not careful, well intentioned land use policies can and will contribute to rural gentrification and change who can afford to live in our small communities.

We do not believe that was the goal and it absolutely can not be the outcome

Rural Vermont is under real stress right now. Schools, healthcare, and local economies.

We are here. And we need you engaged with us.