



SENATE BILL 59: Revise Voluntary Ag. District Laws.

2025-2026 General Assembly

Committee:	Senate Agriculture, Energy, and Environment.	Date:	March 4, 2025
	If favorable, re-refer to Rules and Operations of the Senate		
Introduced by:	Sens. Galey, Jackson, Jones	Prepared by:	Chris Saunders
Analysis of:	First Edition		Committee Counsel

OVERVIEW: *Senate Bill 59 would amend the process for State and local agencies and governmental units to condemn qualifying farmland in a voluntary agricultural district (VAD) by:*

- *Requiring an ordinance establishing a VAD to limit the ability of a State or local public agency or government entity to condemn qualifying farmland in a VAD.*
- *Extending the period within which an agricultural advisory board (Board) must hold a public hearing on a proposed State or local agency condemnation from 30 days to 45 days.*
- *Prohibiting an agency from formally initiating a condemnation action until 120 days after the date on which the Board submits its findings and recommendations to the agency.*

This act would become effective October 1, 2025, and would apply to condemnation actions initiated by any State or local agency or governmental unit on or after that date.

[As introduced, this bill was identical to H126, as introduced by Reps. Dixon, N. Jackson, which is currently in House Agriculture and Environment.]

CURRENT LAW AND BACKGROUND: Under current law, a local government may adopt an ordinance establishing a voluntary agricultural district (VAD) and appointing an agricultural advisory board (Board). Farmland may qualify for inclusion in a VAD if it meets all of the following criteria:

- It is used for bona fide farm purposes.
- It is managed in accordance with Soil Conservation Service defined erosion control practices.
- It is under a conservation agreement with the local government prohibiting nonfarm use or development of the land for at least 10 years, except for the creation of up to three lots that meet applicable zoning and subdivision regulations.

The ordinance establishing the VAD may limit the ability of any State or local public agency or governmental unit to condemn any interest in qualifying farmland within a VAD until the agency has requested the Board to hold a public hearing. The Board must hold a public hearing within 30 days of receiving a request to hold the public hearing. Following the public hearing, the Board must submit written findings and a recommendation to the decision-making body of the agency proposing acquisition of the qualifying farm property. The agency may not initiate a condemnation action while the proposed condemnation is before the Board.

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Director



Legislative Analysis
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Senate Bill 59

Page 2

BILL ANALYSIS: Senate Bill 59 would make the following changes regarding condemnations in a VAD:

- An ordinance establishing a VAD would be required to limit the ability of a State or local agency or government entity to condemn qualifying farmland in a VAD.
- The Board would have 45 days, instead of 30 days, to hold the public hearing.
- The agency would be prohibited from initiating a condemnation until 120 days after the date the Board submits its findings and recommendations to the agency.

EFFECTIVE DATE: This act would become effective October 1, 2025, and would apply to condemnation actions initiated by any State or local agency or governmental unit on or after that date.