



News Coverage on Property Tax Reform

Proposed reforms for tax assessment, appeals

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Unhappy with the current property-tax assessment system and tax-appeal process? Here are some ideas that have been floated:

» **The 15 percent rule:** In New Jersey, any tax-challenge settlement has to reduce a property's assessment by at least 16 percent. If the discrepancy is any less than that, the [homeowner](#) [3] is out of luck. Some local officials say bringing such a law to New York would cut out minor reductions, pursued as a "volume game" by mass-market appeals companies. Professional tax challengers like Claire Gangi of Empire Tax Reductions, one of the biggest tax challengers in the nation, counter that even lesser amounts are valuable to people like senior citizens on a fixed income.

» **Statewide revaluation:** It's expensive, but proponents argue this would level the playing field, bring equity to the system and reduce the demand for professional challengers in the long-term. "Continual reassessments are the best way to ensure that everyone pays their fair share of [taxes](#) [3]," said Geoff Gloak, spokesman for the New York Department of Taxation and Finance. Initially though, local re-evaluations have sparked more appeals to the boards of assessment review. In a typical revalued community, a third of the homes' assessments go up, a third go down and a third stay the same. Owners whose assessments go up become more

likely to appeal ? and perhaps even more likely to vote for someone else in the next election.

» **Increase appeal fees:** It's now just \$30 to appeal the board of assessment review's decision; raising that fee could help deter frivolous challenges.

» **Standardize the grievance process:** Assessors say the law should require more information on the actual grievance form such as a picture of the subject property, a note on what school district it is in, and disclosure of whether it has perks such as a pool, central air conditioning or waterfront land. Many say the standards need teeth as well ? so if someone conceals their renovated kitchen, for example, they could be fined. Finally, they say, to ensure accurate ?comparables,? [homeowners](#)^[3] should not be able to use a property that went through a short-sale or foreclosure to gauge their own property's market value.

Allow right of access: Privacy prevails when assessments come to a small claims case ? meaning no one weighing the case really knows what's inside the home, unless there's a building permit to document recent changes. Assessors would love to have the right to enter the property of a home subject to a tax challenge so they can check for any upgrades themselves. A state appeals court decision unanimously upheld homeowners' privacy rights last year.

» **Require appeals ?pros? to be licensed:** Unlike lawyers, auditors or [stockbrokers](#)^[3], anyone can challenge an assessment on behalf of anyone else. Some challengers have real estate or appraiser licenses, but many have no formal training. Proponents of this change say a standardized ?assessment? licensing could go a long way toward establishing credibility within the industry.

» **Increase court staffing:** Right now, there are only a handful of hearing officers to rule on tax-appeal challenges for state courts; some say this encourages settlements, to the detriment of municipalities.

One of the suggestions in this clip is to standardize assessment practices and statewide revaluation. This could level the playing field, and avoid challenges to the assessment.

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