

Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

Jessica Bourque 271-2104

SB 103-FN-LOCAL, relative to the number of polling stations that are available for certain towns.

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025

Time Opened: 9:17 a.m.

Time Closed: 9:39 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Gray, Rochefort, Perkins Kwoka and Long

Members of the Committee Absent: Senator Lang

Bill Analysis: This bill requires towns and cities to have at least one polling place per every 20,000 registered voters unless the town or city has received approval from the secretary of state for fewer locations.

Sponsors:

Sen. Murphy
Rep. Osborne

Sen. Lang
Rep. Berry

Sen. Gray
Rep. Pauer

Who supports the bill: Senator Murphy, David Scanlan

Who opposes the bill: Dave Nelson, Tina Guilford, Sarah Burke Cohen

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Keith Murphy, Prime Sponsor

- This bill is an effort to ensure that voters can get to the polls and cast a vote without waiting in lengthy lines.
- This bill would require towns and cities to have at least one polling location per every 20,000 voters unless the town or city has received a waiver from the New Hampshire Secretary of State.

David Scanlan, NH Secretary of State

- Supports this bill.
- New Hampshire has the country's smallest polling locations and the largest.
- Record turnout in the last General Election created lines at almost every polling location, and in some cases, the lines were too long.
- This bill is one strategy to decrease the lines at polling locations by increasing the number of polling locations if the population reaches a certain point.

- Exceptions could be made if towns submit a plan that talks about how the voting process will be implemented that day and that plan is submitted for approval through the Secretary of State's Office.
 - He also noted that adding the NH Attorney General to the waiver approval process may be a good idea.
- 20,000 is a starting point. The committee may want to adjust that number. 20,000 would affect four or five towns in the State. Cities are not affected by this bill because they are divided into wards.

Senator Perkins Kwoka asked if there are other ways to address delays.

- Secretary Scanlan said there could be a requirement for a certain number of ballot-counting machines based on the town's population or city.
- Technology upgrades could also be looked at.

Senator Gray said that in existing law, the State requires a certain number of booths, and it might be a good idea if we start requiring a certain amount of parking.

- Secretary Scanlan said parking and training are other issues that could be looked at.

Senator Gray said even though this bill won't affect the towns he represents, Senator Gray saw significant lines in his district for folks waiting to register to vote.

- Secretary Scanlan said there are a lot of management things that can be done. Durham usually has a large number of same-day voter registrations, and they moved along well on election day because they had plenty of stations set up.

Senator Long said that this bill proposes 20,000 registered voters and asked if there is a number where this starts to be an issue.

- Secretary Scanlan said the number is usually around 15,000.

Senator Gray said that Derry has multiple entrances and ample parking, and they do a good job.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition:

Tina Guilford, Derry Town Clerk

- In the past, they have had 1, 2, and 3 polling locations. Regardless of the number of polling places, there are usually traffic issues on election day.
- Derry has 22,000 people registered to vote. 18,148 ballots were cast in the last election.
- Derry was very prepared for a large voter turnout in the last election, but unfortunately, traffic issues were their major issue.
- Already registered voters didn't wait more than 15 or 20 minutes.
- There were traffic issues in the morning but not in the afternoon.

- Derry doesn't have a lot of schools with enough parking spaces, which is one of the difficulties with their polling location.
- Is concerned that this bill is trying to force towns to have multiple polling locations, which means spending more money.
- Believes that more check-in stations could help.

Dave Nelson, Derry Town Moderator

- As a moderator, he wants to ensure that everyone can vote expeditiously. He never wants to see anyone discouraged and turn away from voting.
- Traffic is the main issue in Derry.
- A 2nd location in Derry doesn't necessarily work because other potential locations don't have enough parking spaces.

Senator Perkins Kwoka said that everyone shares the goal of getting voters to vote quickly and expeditiously and asked if Mr. Nelson is saying that this bill is going to cost towns additional money to try and accomplish a goal that the town is already accomplishing.

- Mr. Nelson said Derry has unique bottlenecks, and he is not sure a 2nd location would help given the choices Derry has.

Senator Perkins Kwoka asked if they use electronic poll books in Derry.

- Mr. Nelson said they do use electronic poll books in Derry.

Senator Perkins Kwoka followed up and asked if he sees poll books contributing to lower wait times in Derry.

- Mr. Nelson said they do see that poll books help alleviate waiting times in Derry.

Senator Long said he was impressed with the number of workers they had on election day and agrees that traffic in Derry is the main problem there. He noted that this bill doesn't address traffic and stated that opening another location would cost more and wouldn't necessarily help address traffic issues.

Senator Rochefort said that the way he reads the bill, Derry wouldn't be affected and seems to be doing a good job. As he reads lines 6 and 7, he thinks Derry would be a good candidate for a waiver. Senator Rochefort then asked Mr. Nelson if Derry would submit a plan for a waiver.

- Mr. Nelson said Derry would submit a plan and request a waiver.

Senator Rochefort asked if Mr. Nelson is comfortable with the bill's current language that Derry would be granted a waiver or if they would be looking for more objective standards for granting a waiver.

- Mr. Nelson said he has confidence that the Secretary of State and/or the Attorney General would hear them out and grant waivers reasonably.

jab
Date Hearing Report completed: February 7, 2025