

Senate Executive Departments and Administration Committee

Ben Mickens 271-1403

SB 424-FN, relative to the organization of the department of business and economic affairs.

Hearing Date: January 21, 2026

Time Opened: 10:28 a.m.

Time Closed: 11:14 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Pearl, McGough, Gannon, Altschiller and Reardon

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill repeals the position of the northern county area industrial agent within the department of business and economic affairs, and instead authorizes the commissioner of the department to reallocate those responsibilities to other departmental directors and employees, except to ensure that all areas of the state are served equally.

Sponsors:

Sen. McGough

Sen. Murphy

Rep. Wall

Who supports the bill: Senator Tim McGough

Who opposes the bill: Senator David Rochefort, former Senator Lou D'Allesandro, Representative Mike Ouellet, Representative Linda DeSilverstro, Representative Linda Massimilla, Executive Councilor Joe Kenney, Former Speaker Steve Shurtleff, Former Representative Brad Bailey, Raymond Gorman (Coos County), Timothy Egan (Coos Economic Development Corporation), Charyl Reardon (White Mountains Attractions Association), George Bald, Stuart Arnett, Simon Berrio, Maura Annette Chappelle, Louis Shine, Barry Normandeau, Daniel Richardson.

Who is neutral on the bill: None.

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator McGough

- This bill is about elevating positions within the BEA. We want to promote regional directors across the state, including the North Country. The Incumbent North Country Industrial Agent would likely be nominated for this new position.

The flaw corrected in this amendment makes clear there is a new position for the Industrial Agent to come into. We would also clean up the effective dates so that the new positions are created before this old position is removed.

- We want to update the structure of the BEA so that every region with an economic development director can be better recognized and organized within the BEA structure.
- The bill also helps specify what the commissioner should look for in candidates, for example language skills for the North Country regional director.
- This bill is not about removing economic development positions but wanting to expand and develop these positions.
- There will be an amendment to the amendment for the effective dates.

Senator Pearl clarifies that this position would add 4 new positions in the BEA.

Senator McGough responds that it enables the Commissioner to allocate existing positions, of which there are 8 or 9, by region.

Senator Pearl asked if Senator McGough expects a large fiscal note.

Senator McGough says he does not, and some of the numbers on the existing fiscal note would need more clarity.

Senator Altschiller asked if the BEA was involved with the restructuring language.

Senator McGough said that there is currently some change in leadership there and this bill should help address that with the interim director.

Senator Altschiller followed up to clarify if BEA asked for the restructuring.

Senator McGough responded that they did not.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition:

Executive Councilor Kenney

- The North Country is a difficult place to live and work in. This bill needs more work, and I do not support it. The North Country is an economically distressed area and faces a multitude of challenges. The Industrial Agent works incredibly hard to facilitate the business of North Country. The incumbent is well respected across the region, state, and internationally.
- This legislation does not have input from BEA, the economic development associations in the north, and so on.
- In my job I rely on the Industrial Agent to help constituents.
- I ask this bill be moved ITL

Senator McGough asked if the Executive Councilor would support the elevation of the position.

Councilor Kenney stated that he would not. It works as it is, a grass roots position. If anything, he believed the legislature should build out the current position.

Senator David Rochefort

- I represent the entire north country and 1/3rd of the area of New Hampshire.
- In Concord we run on one-liners— “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”
- No officials, board members, or constituents have supported or had input on this bill.
- I request a vote of ITL.

Representative Mike Oullete

- I represent the entire Coos County delegation.
- The current situation works. The entire Coos County delegation opposes this bill, unanimously

Senator McGough asked if there was any concern the Industrial Agent would not be appointed to the new rule.

Rep. Ouellet stated that there is no guarantee of the incumbent would be appointed. To echo Senator Rochefort, its not broke and does not need to be fixed.

Representative Linda DeSilvestro

- The current occupant should remain in the position as described in statute.
- I would add that Commissioner George Bald appointed Mr. Lamontagne due to his deep knowledge of New Hampshire business and his relations with Canada to strengthen opportunities across the border.
- Representative Di Silvestro asked for a vote of ITL.

Former Senator Lou D’Allesandro

- I have no support to SB 424. Raymond Burton would not support this bill. It has been a long running issue to elevate the North Country to be equal with the rest of the state.
- The economic well-being of the north country is dependent on continued trade with Canada.
- The economic viability of the North Country is at stake. The incumbent has done excellent work.
- I would reiterate my strong opposition to the bill.

Former Speaker Steve Shurtleff

- I spent 10 years on the Canadian Trade Council. The current situation works. With respect, amendments would not be able to help the bill.
- I would ask for a vote of ITL.

Former Representative Linda Massimilla

- Benoit Lamontagne has an extensive range of connections in the North Country and in Canada.
- He has done considerable work to help develop the North Country.
- The Industrial Agent makes an excellent usage of his fluency in French.
- The North Country is frequently an afterthought, and the Industrial Agent is a major benefit to us.
- I express my opposition to this bill.

Former Representative Brad Bailey

- I am expressing my strong opposition to this bill.
- The North Country has distinct needs compared to places like Manchester and Concord and that the Industrial Agent understands the specific needs and economic nuances of the region.
- I recently asked relevant members of the North Country if they had been consulted on this bill. I received no affirmations.
- I also asked Senator Rochefort if he had been approached by the bill's sponsors to involve him in talks over the bill. The answer received was no.
- I would ask the committee to vote ITL on the bill and all amendments.

Former DRED Commissioner George Bald

- Mr. Lamontagne is hugely qualified for the current position and has done well to bring business from Quebec and surrounding areas.
- Losing this position and the incumbent would be a major loss for the North Country.
- If you go online and look at bus maps of southern towns vs northern towns and you can see the struggles of the North Country.
- Instead, we should increase funding for the position including international travel funding.

Senator McGough asked if the commissioner would share his thoughts on the promotion of the position.

Former Commissioner Ball stated that he would be opposed to this change. This position should be permanent and not subject to re-approval.

Barry Normandeau

- I am a business owner in New Hampshire. The North Country business community is completely against this bill and changes.
- As a business owner, I am always relying on this position. I help turn around failing companies and the industrial agent is always helping us do that.
- I am against this bill.

Raymond Gorman, Coos County Commissioner

- The county commissioners oppose this bill.
- We also oppose it, even with the amendments.
- We could have had far more people come to testify against this bill.
- Many people from the Northern Country are in favor of enhancing economic development, however not in legislation such as is proposed in SB 424.

Stuart Arnett

- The success of the region-based industrial agent was helpful to replicate across the state.
- Agents based in Concord had less ties to industry than those who were geographically based.
- We also saw region-based economic development develop their personal ties to communities.
- Why have these positions permanent? It is because it is then too easy for new commissioners to come in and move assets around. The system, as it is, allows for permanent representation for the North Country business community.

Neutral Information Presented: None.

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Date Hearing Report completed: January 23, 2026