

# Senate Judiciary Committee

*Brendan Bunnell 271-4063*

**SB 463-FN**, relative to possession of firearms in safe school zones.

**Hearing Date:** January 20, 2026

**Time Opened:** 3:32 p.m.

**Time Closed:** 4:00 p.m.

**Members of the Committee Present:** Senators Gannon, Abbas, Carson and Altschiller

**Members of the Committee Absent:** Senator Reardon

**Bill Analysis:** This bill prohibits carrying a firearm in a safe school zone.

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**Sponsors:**

Sen. Fenton

Sen. Long

Sen. Rosenwald

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Sen. Altschiller

Sen. Prentiss

Rep. Meuse

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**Who supports the bill:** 272 individuals signed in support of this bill. For a complete list of those who signed in support please email [Brendan.Bunnell@gc.nh.gov](mailto:Brendan.Bunnell@gc.nh.gov).

**Who opposes the bill:** 41 individuals signed in support of this bill. For a complete list of those who signed in opposition please email [Brendan.Bunnell@gc.nh.gov](mailto:Brendan.Bunnell@gc.nh.gov).

**Who is neutral on the bill:** None.

**Summary of testimony presented:**

**Senator Donovan Fenton (SD-10)**, introduced Senate Bill 463, explaining that it addresses the possession of firearms on school property. He emphasized that he speaks as a legislator, a gun owner who supports the Second Amendment, and as a parent of young children.

- Stated that the bill does not restrict lawful gun ownership, carrying in appropriate places, or self-defense, but instead creates a clear boundary around schools.
- Cited that in the current year there had been at least 233 school shootings across K–12 schools and colleges nationwide.

- Described his son experiencing a lock down drill and the difficulty of explaining to a child that someone with a gun might legally be allowed inside the school. He argued that teachers and staff are put in an impossible position because they cannot distinguish between a lawful carrier and a real threat during an emergency.
- Under current law, adults can carry firearms onto school property and schools lack clear guidance on how to respond. He said this ambiguity puts lives at risk. He compared schools to other sensitive places like hospitals, where threats are immediately identifiable and law enforcement can respond quickly.
- He explained that the bill requires firearms to remain secured in vehicles during drop-off and pick-up, while law enforcement and active-duty military remain exempt. He stated that the goal is to create gun-free school zones so that threats are unmistakable and response times are faster.
- Referenced growing up after Columbine and argued that fear should not define children's education. Stated that there is no legitimate reason for civilians to bring firearms into classrooms, that school safety is a responsibility rather than a political statement, and that his identity as a gun owner and a parent are not in conflict.

**J.E. Simkin**, testified in opposition, stating that the bill mirrors Massachusetts law that criminalizes firearms on school property even for licensed carriers unless they receive written permission from school officials.

- Argued that people intent on committing violence will not be deterred by such laws and that the only effect is to add an extra charge after a crime occurs. He said the bill would harm law-abiding citizens more than criminals.
- Gave the example of voting locations that are located in schools, arguing that the bill would force people to choose between their right to vote and their right to carry a firearm. He compared New Hampshire to Massachusetts, stating that Massachusetts has far more restrictive gun laws but higher violent crime rates, while New Hampshire has remained one of the safest states for decades.
- He argued that proponents of gun control should live in Massachusetts if they prefer that system. He also noted that the bill contains no requirement for posting signage around school zones, meaning people could unknowingly violate the law. He concluded that the bill is futile, dangerous to law-abiding citizens, and should be voted inexpedient to legislate.

**Kimberly Morin**, representing the Women's Defense League, testified in opposition and stated that the federal Gun-Free School Zones Act already makes schools gun-free, except for concealed carriers with proper licensing.

- Argued that people cannot legally open-carry firearms into schools under existing federal law. She said the bill disproportionately impacts single mothers

who rely on firearms for protection from abusive ex-partners or stalkers, especially those who walk their children to school and cannot leave a firearm in a vehicle.

- Rejected the idea that parents should need school permission to exercise a fundamental right to self-defense. She argued that New Hampshire is consistently ranked one of the safest states and that mass shootings have increased since gun-free zones were created because criminals know no one is armed. She concluded that the bill is about restricting rights, not improving safety.

**Kathleen Slover**, testified in support and argued that New Hampshire has no state law prohibiting firearms on school grounds for adults, only for students. She gave an example where a firearm could be dropped on a playground and recovered without consequences.

- Described a 2023 incident outside Portsmouth High School where a man posted a video threatening to shoot up the school and was later found with multiple firearms, body armor, and ammunition.
- Said the FBI confirmed the threat was real and that her own son was in the school at the time. She stated that the man legally possessed firearms on school grounds when he made the threat.
- Explained that a 2022 New Hampshire law prevents local governments from enforcing federal gun regulations, leaving schools and police in legal uncertainty.
- Cited the Bruen decision, which allows restrictions in sensitive places like schools, and argued that gun-free zones create clarity and safety by making it obvious who is allowed to carry firearms and who is not.

**Rep. David Meuse**, testified in support, referencing the Brown University shooting and explaining that some students had already experienced shootings earlier in their lives, creating “multi-generational victims.”

- Argued that restricting firearms in schools is about location, not personal identity, and that courts recognize schools and courthouses as sensitive places where restrictions are justified.
- Raised concerns about accidental discharges, arguments escalating, and general risks associated with firearms in emotionally charged environments. He stated he could not understand why people resist firearm restrictions in schools and referenced a former colleague who opposed campus carry because of concern for his grandchild.
- Stated that federal prohibitions exist for good reason and that New Hampshire’s failure to enforce them is dangerous.

- Senator Abbas asked a question about the provision allowing firearms to be kept in vehicles during drop-off or pick-up if unloaded and locked. He raised concerns that this could require people to handle firearms on school property, increasing risk.
  - Representative Meuse responded that the bill does not require unloading on school grounds and that responsible gun owners could secure firearms beforehand.
- Senator Altschiller asked why firearms are prohibited in courthouses.
  - Meuse responded that courthouses contain dangerous individuals and require armed security, and that historical cases support prohibiting weapons in such environments.
    - Altschiller followed up by stating that people plan ahead when going to court and should similarly plan ahead when going to schools, making accommodations before arriving.

**Sarah Tollefsen**, testified in support as a parent and co-founder of Goffstown Parents in Action, formed after Uvalde to advocate for school safety. She explained that her group worked across party lines to implement door barricade devices in schools.

- Stated that the bill focuses on location-based risk, not ownership, and that similar restrictions already exist in places like courthouses and government buildings. She argued that schools already have safety protocols such as controlled entry points and lockdown drills, and allowing firearms undermines these efforts.
- Said the bill preserves local control, includes reasonable exceptions, and aligns with New Hampshire values. She urged lawmakers to prioritize children's safety over political divisions.

**J.E. Simkin** gave brief rebuttal testimony, responding to the courthouse comparison. He stated that courthouses and prisons are different because they have armed security, whereas schools do not. He argued that firearms are only prohibited in New Hampshire in places where armed security already exists.