

# Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

*Jessica Bourque 271-2104*

**SB 534-FN**, relative to foreign funding and influence in constitutional amendment and local ballot question campaigns.

**Hearing Date:** January 27, 2026

**Time Opened:** 9:17 a.m.

**Time Closed:** 9:24 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 strengthens enforcement against foreign funding and foreign direction of campaigns for constitutional amendments and local ballot questions.

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**Sponsors:**

Sen. Avard  
Rep. Sirois  
Rep. Pauer

Sen. Birdsell  
Rep. Kofalt

Sen. Carson  
Rep. D. Kelley

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**Who supports the bill:** Rep. Diane Pauer, Rep. Jason Snead, Tricia Melillo, Periklis Karoutas, Daniel Richardson, Jared Buckley, Corinne Gordon, Lisa Ayer, Caitlin Sutherland

**Who opposes the bill:** Richard Spence, Janet Insolia, Phil Hatcher, Karen Burnett-Kurie

**Who is neutral on the bill:** Olivia Zink

**Summary of testimony presented:**

**Tricia Melillo, Senate Majority Caucus Director, introduced the bill on behalf of the prime sponsor, Senator Kevin Avard.**

- Protects and strengthens the enforcement of foreign funding in our state.
- There are already laws in statutes that prohibit contributions to candidates from foreign nationals. But there is a gray area regarding local and state ballot questions.
- This bill ensures donors are qualified contributors.

**Senator Rochefort** acknowledged that this bill is designed to address foreign governments' involvement in our political system. He noted that large tracts of land in his district are being purchased and effectively set aside for carbon sequestration, which prevents harvesting. Through his own research, no one seems to know who is buying these carbon credits. His primary concern is whether foreign entities are purchasing these lands to influence our timber market, and he questions whether there is a way to trace or identify the buyers of these credits.

Ms. Melillo said she would pass his question on to Senator Avard and the stakeholders.

**Olivia Zink, Open Democracy**

- Testifying just to provide information. Open Democracy supports the idea of banning foreign money in our elections, but this bill isn't ready for prime time as currently drafted, so they are not going to take a position on it.
- Line 8 refers to "measure" and cites the definition in 664:2, which states "shall mean any constitutional amendment or question that is submitted or intended to be submitted to a popular vote at an election." She does not believe it is a good idea to place constitutional questions on local ballots as she feels this should be reserved for the state.
- There are already strong laws governing campaign finance and foreign nationals.
- If the purpose of this bill is to extend the state ban on contributions at the local level, then the committee should consider amending local ordinances to achieve this.
- Ms. Zink suggested an easier way of accomplishing what she thinks is the intent of this bill would be to make RSA 664:5 applicable to local elections.
- Knows that the state faces additional challenges with foreign nationals unrelated to campaign finance and is uncertain about possible solutions.