

Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

Jessica Bourque 271-2104

SB 588-FN, requiring that all municipalities that are served by a school district vote on the closure of schools.

Hearing Date: February 3, 2026

Time Opened: 9:15 a.m.

Time Closed: 9:24 a.m.

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

Members of the Committee Absent: Senator Lang

Bill Analysis: This bill requires that voters residing in all municipalities that are served by a school district vote on the closure of schools. This bill also requires school boards to hold a public meeting for such vote, with the same procedure applying to both single district and cooperative school districts.

Sponsors:

Sen. Innis
Sen. Carson

Sen. Murphy
Rep. Noble

Sen. Ward

Who supports the bill: 2 people signed in to support this bill. For a full list of names, please contact committee aide, Jessica Bourque, at jessica.bourque@gc.nh.gov

Who opposes the bill: 64 people signed in opposed to this bill. For a full list of names, please contact committee aide, Jessica Bourque, at jessica.bourque@gc.nh.gov

Summary of testimony presented:

Senator Dan Innis, Prime sponsor, District 7

- This bill originates from a discussion he had with one of his district superintendents while talking about school budgets. The superintendent pointed out that all four elementary schools in the district have an average class size of 8-10 students. Two of the elementary schools need major renovations, which would cost the district between \$60 and \$80 million dollars.
- Senator Innis asked the superintendent if the district could consolidate and close the schools that need renovations. The superintendent explained that, logistically, they could do that easily, but the charter states that only the town where the school is located has the authority to vote to close it; no other district towns have a say.

- Senator Innis explained that, essentially, one or two towns make the decision, but the taxes in the other communities are affected too.
- He stated that passage of the bill would maintain local control over property taxes and give voters a voice regarding the effects of taxation.

Senator Perkins Kwoka said she appreciated the background information and asked why the language requires 20 voters to sign the petition. Why that number?

Senator Daniel Innis said it seemed like a reasonable number and that was the one suggested during drafting, so they went with it. Senator Innis also said he is open to amending it to a number that makes sense to the committee.

Senator Perkins-Kwoka followed up, noting that a number so low could be used to try to close schools in use, and asked whether safeguards could be implemented to protect well-functioning schools.

Senator Innis mentioned he is considering the warrant article process in Bradford. In Bradford, you need 25 signatures in a town with a population of 1,600, so that number makes sense. The problem he sees is that district sizes across the state differ in population. In some towns, 20 signatures might be sufficient, but in others, it wouldn't be.

Senator Long said RSA 194:35 requires 20 voters to petition the superior court, but this bill repeals that, and asked whether he would be open to adding more signatures to the 20.

Senator Innis said it seems logical to identify a number that works for everyone.