

Senate Judiciary Committee

Brendan Bunnell 271-4063

HB 1260-FN, relative to marriage registration forms and delayed certificates of marriage.

Hearing Date: March 24, 2026

Time Opened: 1:01 p.m.

Time Closed: 1:08 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Gannon and Reardon

Members of the Committee Absent: Senators Abbas, Carson and Altschiller

Bill Analysis: This bill permits marriage applicants to complete the marriage application in advance, establishes a fee for filing a delayed marriage certificate, and updates all relevant statutory language in the chapter to be gender neutral.

Sponsors:

Rep. Dargie

Rep. Petrigno

Who supports the bill: Representative Paul Dargie, Representative Timothy Horrigan, and Cory Stone.

Who opposes the bill: None.

Who is neutral on the bill: None.

Summary of the testimony presented:

Representative Paul Dargie, representing Hillsborough District 43 (Milford), introduced the bill and explained that it contains three main sections.

- The first section allows marriage registration forms to be completed outside the presence of a city or town clerk, while still requiring that the applicants finalize and sign the form in person before the clerk. It also permits the use of a fillable PDF or similar digital format instead of requiring handwritten forms.
- The second section establishes a \$25 fee for processing a delayed certificate of marriage, which is required when a marriage is not formally registered within six months. He explained that this process is more complex and time-consuming for clerks, and the fee is intended to offset that additional workload, with the revenue retained by the municipality.

- The third section updates statutory language throughout the relevant RSA chapter to make it gender-neutral, replacing terms such as “bride” and “groom.” He noted that this portion was added by amendment and was not part of the original request.
- He also stated that the bill passed the House Judiciary Committee 17–1 and was later approved on the House consent calendar with an OTPA recommendation. He described the bill as straightforward and urged passage.
- Senator Gannon asked whether the bill was brought forward at the request of others or was the representative’s own idea.
 - Representative Dargie responded that his wife, who is the Milford town clerk and a past president of the New Hampshire City and Town Clerks Association, along with the association itself, requested the bill. He clarified that this request applied to the first two sections, while the gender-neutral language changes were added separately.
- Senator Gannon then asked a personal question about whether Representative Dargie supported the inclusion of gender-neutral language.
 - Representative Dargie responded that he did support it, stating that it reflects the times.

Representative Timothy Horrigan testified in support of the bill, and identified himself as a member of the House Judiciary Committee. He explained that he was responsible for adding the gender-neutral language amendment to the bill, which he described as improving upon Representative Paul Dargie’s proposal.

- Stated that he is a member of the minority caucus and that there had initially been uncertainty about whether the majority caucus would support such an amendment. As a result, he was tasked with requesting that the Office of Legislative Services draft a gender-neutral amendment.
- Explained that, coincidentally, members of the majority caucus had independently developed a nearly identical amendment. He stated that the two versions were essentially the same aside from minor formatting differences, such as numbering. Ultimately, the final amendment reflected bipartisan cooperation, with sponsorship attributed to members from both caucuses, including leadership. He described this as a positive example of bipartisan progress, particularly on an issue connected to marriage equality, which he characterized as one of the most important legislative achievements of his career, though still subject to some ongoing public debate.
- He also noted that he had signed in as neutral on the amendment itself procedurally, since the committee had not yet formally taken it up, and asked

whether he should address it immediately or wait to be recognized again during the amendment hearing.

- Senator Gannon asked whether the Office of Legislative Services typically makes statutory language gender-neutral on its own initiative.
 - Representative Horrigan responded that, while there has been a long-standing effort over decades to make statutes gender-neutral, such changes generally require a request from legislators or a committee.
 - He also explained that in reviewing the bill, what initially appeared to be a single instance of non-gender-neutral language led to the discovery of multiple sections in the RSAs requiring updates, and that the amendment was intended to address those comprehensively at once.

BMB

Date Hearing Report completed: March 27, 2026