

# Senate Education Committee

*Trevor Currier 271-4151*

**HB 1635**, modifying the requirements of suicide prevention education policies in schools.

**Hearing Date:** March 24, 2026

**Time Opened:** 11:01 a.m.

**Time Closed:** 11:33 a.m.

**Members of the Committee Present:** Senators Ward, Sullivan, Abbas, Prentiss and Altschiller

**Members of the Committee Absent :** None

**Bill Analysis:** The bill requires that suicide prevention training occur within 30 days of personnel being hired as well as every 2 years thereafter.

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**Sponsors:**

Rep. Litchfield

Rep. Drye

Rep. Kuttab

Rep. Nelson

Rep. Rice

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**Who supports the bill:** 5 People signed in support of HB 1635. To see the full list of sign-ins, please email the committee aide ([trevor.currier@gc.nh.gov](mailto:trevor.currier@gc.nh.gov)).

**Who opposes the bill:** 97 People signed in opposition of HB 1635. To see the full list of sign-ins, please email the committee aide ([trevor.currier@gc.nh.gov](mailto:trevor.currier@gc.nh.gov)).

**Who is neutral on the bill:** 1 Person signed in neutrality to HB 1635. To see the full list of sign-ins, please email the committee aide ([trevor.currier@gc.nh.gov](mailto:trevor.currier@gc.nh.gov)).

**Summary of testimony presented in support:**

**Representative Melissa Litchfield (*Rockingham 32*)**

- Representative Litchfield introduced and testified in support of House Bill 1635
- Representative Litchfield explained that this bill modifies the requirements of suicide prevention education policies in schools.
- She established that suicide prevention training is of the utmost importance.
- She stated the legislation is at the request of a constituent because they believe the training in schools exceeds the training requirements in other professions and states on the same topic.

- Rep. Litchfield confirmed that the current law requires training to be conducted annually for two hours in schools.
- She stated that the bill requires staff to complete the training within thirty days of being hired. She added that the bill changes the training frequency to every two years, but allows districts to go beyond the minimum required.
- She added that the bill removed the number of hours requirement.
- Rep. Litchfield stated that there is limited professional development time, and educators have expressed a desire to receive a more diverse array of training.
- Rep. Litchfield said that there are no objective statistics that speak to the effectiveness of the training.
- She recommended that peers also receive training rather than just the school staff.
- She stated she had no objection to the two-hour annual training requirement but asked that the requirement for new staff to complete the training within thirty days remain.
- Senator Prentiss asked for clarification regarding the statement that school training is more restrictive than training provided to first responders. Representative Litchfield requested that this question be deferred to Representative Drye.
- Senator Prentiss asked if Rep. Litchfield thought the two-hour minimum was too strict for school districts and if she suggested replacing the time requirement with a window of 30 days after the start of the school year. Representative Litchfield responded that her intent is not reflected in the legislation. She wished to maintain the two-hour requirement, but instead of annually, it was to be conducted every two years. She said that she still likes the requirement that the training be completed within thirty days. She is concerned that the training is ineffective and educators remain unaware of all the signs of suicidal thoughts or actions.
- Senator Altschiller inquired whether Rep. Litchfield had completed the Connors Climb Suicide Prevention Training or the training conducted by NAMI. Rep. Litchfield responded that she had not taken either training. Representative Litchfield was aware of a student who left the district due to unaddressed bullying.

**Representative Margaret Drye (*Sullivan 7*)**

- Representative Drye testified in support of House Bill 1635.
- Representative Drye referenced a cardiac call she responded to in her professional capacity as an EMT and noted that previous legislation is likely the reason there was a positive outcome.

- She highlighted that even though CPR training is required every two years, it has still been successfully administered. She also shared that the bill changed the annual training to once every two years.
- She noted the bill ensures all educators participate in the training by requiring it to be completed within their first thirty days of employment.
- She highlighted various other trainings that are completed every two years, such as sexual harassment, abuse, and neglect trainings.
- She established that there are also other trainings that are required on an as-needed basis.
- She stated that the policy change could give districts more flexibility to diversify training on the same topic in years when online modules are not required.
- She believed that removing the two-hour requirement could diversify the ways in which the training is conducted and lead to more effective training, rather than the current competitive nature of the practice.
- She stated the bill maintains the requirement but allows flexibility for schools and emphasized that nothing in the bill prohibits a district from providing training annually.

**Summary of testimony presented in opposition:**

**Holly Stevens, *NAMI NH***

- Ms. Stevens testified in opposition to House Bill 1635.
- She implored the committee to review her written testimony, which included statistics on suicide in New Hampshire.
- She stated that schools implement suicide prevention trainings and discussions differently across the state, but everyone agrees that the minimum two-hour annual training must be completed, serving as a baseline for districts that want to provide additional support in this area.
- She expressed concern for the schools that only complete the two-hour annual requirement as prescribed by law.
- She reflected on a conversation she had with a New Hampshire school counselor and stated that the counselor said that school personnel are often the first individuals to detect the signs of suicidal ideation in students. She shared that staff remain uncomfortable talking with students when they recognize alarming signs.
- She emphasized the importance of annual training and said that it boosted staff confidence to discuss suicide with students.
- She stated that her written testimony includes testimony from a person who felt that school staff saved her life when she was experiencing suicidal ideation.
- She said that the yearly training requirement helps staff make suicide prevention second nature.

- She stated that suicidal thoughts and behaviors remain elevated for New Hampshire youth and highlighted the recent loss of a New Hampshire child.
- Senator Abbas referenced the written testimony provided and asked if Ms. Stevens would oppose changing the training requirement to once every two years. Ms. Stevens clarified that the existing law requires training annually, and House Bill 1635 changed it to every two years. She added that without the mandatory two-hour requirement, schools could administer a five-minute quiz to satisfy the requirements in House Bill 1635.
- Senator Abbas inquired whether there was room for a compromise or if Ms. Stevens believed the current law was the best option. Ms. Stevens pointed out that there is no research defining the best practices for suicide prevention training in schools. She also mentioned that two hours a year is not a significant burden.
- Senator Prentiss asked if suicide between the ages of ten and twenty-four is the second leading cause of death in the state. She confirmed the statistic and added that suicide is the leading cause of death for New Hampshire kids aged ten to fourteen.
- Senator Prentiss asked how Ms. Stevens would balance the importance of delivering content and subject matter against the time it takes. Ms. Stevens considered the staff's proficiency in having uncomfortable conversations, which are essential skills for recognizing signs and symptoms and engaging in the necessary discussions.
- Ms. Stevens pointed out the differences between CPR training and Suicide Prevention training. She mentioned that there's no stigma attached to having a heart attack, but there is with mental illness.
- Senator Prentiss established that New Hampshire's youth suicidal ideation statistics are higher than the national average. Senator Prentiss asked whether the priority is to have the suicide prevention discussion annually. Ms. Stevens stated that New Hampshire had recently experienced a slight decline in suicidality in schools, but until the numbers decline further, the yearly training must continue.
- Senator Ward asked if the parents were ever involved in the discussions. Ms. Stevens stated her organization provides training to many different groups, but it would be up to the schools whether to include the parents in the suicide prevention discussions.

**Neutral Information Presented:**

***Jenny O'Higgins, NH Department of Health and Human Services***

- Ms. O'Higgins identified suicide prevention as a critical public health issue, noting that it remains the leading cause of death among New Hampshire

children ages 10 to 14—contrasting with national data, where unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death for this age group.

- She added that suicide is the second leading cause of death for those 15-34 in New Hampshire.
- She established that school-based prevention reaches the most affected population.
- She stated school staff are often the first people to recognize the signs of suicidal ideation.
- She stated that repetitive training is intentionally designed to ensure adults can intervene and are more likely to do so in the moment.
- She stated that recent systematic reviews of universal school-based training have highlighted significant improvements in interventions.
- She stated that finding evidence-based suicide prevention training shorter than two hours would be difficult.
- She shared that the number of kids experiencing a cardiac arrest is fifteen times lower than those being treated for a self-inflicted injury to justify the frequency of the training.
- She stated that two hours is the minimum and not the goal.
- Senator Sullivan stated that the numbers in New Hampshire have increased even though the law was enacted five years ago. She asked if we should be approaching the issue differently. Ms. O'Higgins established that there has been a slight reduction in New Hampshire suicide fatalities but cautioned that the numbers cannot be held to a trend because they have not been enshrined into law long enough.
- Senator Ward asked if she preferred reverting back to two hours every year. Ms. O'Higgins confirmed that the current law is sufficient.