

Senate Education Committee

Trevor Currier 271-4151

HB 1573, permitting excused absences for students participating in civic engagement or attending a career or technical education event.

Hearing Date: April 7, 2026

Time Opened: 10:26 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:50 a.m.

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

Members of the Committee Absent : Senators Altschiller and Sullivan

Bill Analysis: This bill permits excused absences for students that are participating in civic engagement activities and career or technical education (CTE) activities so long as parental notice is provided to schools and other requirements are met. The bill also directs the state board of education to develop rules and alternative academic credits relative to participation in civic or CTE activities.

Sponsors:

Rep. Thibault

Rep. Drye

Rep. Farrington

Rep. Freeman

Rep. Harvey-Bolia

Rep. Litchfield

Rep. Moffett

Rep. Wheeler

Sen. Innis

Sen. Sullivan

Who supports the bill:7 People signed in support of HB 1573. To see the full list of sign-ins, please email the committee aide (trevor.currier@gc.nh.gov).

Who opposes the bill:34 People signed in opposition to HB 1573. To see the full list of sign-ins, please email the committee aide (trevor.currier@gc.nh.gov).

Who is neutral on the bill: No one.

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Representative James Thibault – Merrimack 25

- Representative Thibault introduced and testified in support of House Bill 1573.
- Rep. Thibault stated that every student learns differently, and this bill seeks to expand experiential learning opportunities.

- He established that the legislation grants two excused absences to students participating in civic engagement or career and technical education opportunities.
- He stated that the bill included a narrow definition of civic activity as an event hosted by a government body. He added that this definition excluded campaign events and protests.
- He stated that students may still attend the events excluded from the bill, but those events cannot be considered an excused absence.
- He stated that he would support an amendment to include events hosted by the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He stated that the federal statute cited in the draft amendment includes specific organizations.
- He stated that the issue addressed in the bill affects many students and student groups.
- He stated that the legislation includes carve-outs for multiday Career and Technical Education Conferences. He expressed support for the committee to expand the legislation to include multiday civic activities.
- He highlighted that the events could lead to valuable scholarship and career opportunities.
- He stated that local school policy permits work to be made up only for days when a student's absence was designated as excused. He stated that unexcused absences penalize students.
- He explained that the legislation permits local school districts to set standards regarding proof of attendance and whether or not to excuse more than two absences a year.
- He established that similar legislation was passed in California and New Jersey.
- Senator Prentiss referenced Roman numeral two, line nine, and asked who would decide whether other student events or organizations would qualify beyond those specified in the bill. He replied that the list provided in the legislation is not exhaustive and cited the language regarding the parents' role in making the initial contact with the school.
- Senator Prentiss asked whether an additional guardrail was necessary, noting that there did not appear to be a defined limit on the number of qualified events. He replied that he understood the concern and was willing to work with the committee on an amendment. He emphasized that the intent is to excuse absences for events with educational components.
- Senator Ward asked whether the event had to be politically neutral. He replied that the event must be held by a government entity and noted that campaign events for congresspeople would not be excused.

Casey Peters

- Mr. Peters testified in support of House Bill 1573.
- He stated that the bill allows students to learn outside the classroom and characterized it as nonpartisan.
- He reflected on his personal experience of having to weigh whether he could afford to attend civic events, knowing that his attendance record and/or grades could be affected.

Andrew King

- Mr. King testified in support of House Bill 1573.
- He stated that civic-related events largely happen during the school day and listed many specific examples.
- He reflected on the various civic events he has attended and believed that the events expanded upon what he learned in the classroom.
- He shared that attendance records are important to him and other students.
- He stated that the bill will make civic engagement more accessible to young people in New Hampshire.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition:

Becky Wilson – New Hampshire School Board Association

- Ms. Wilson testified in opposition to House Bill 1573.
- She stated that she is unsure whether the legislation is necessary.
- She noted that students attending CTE programs through the school district are granted excused absences for attending a school event.
- She stated block absences are not used anymore, instead the .
- She stated that she does not believe a job-shadow day would be considered an unexcused absence because it is part of their school curriculum.
- She shared that students can apply for an extended learning opportunity in which they would earn credit while still participating in experiential learning opportunities outside of school.
- She stated that non-excused absences come into play due to the emphasis on hands-on learning, which is difficult to replicate outside the classroom.
- She referenced the school district's attendance policy for JH and stated that the policy allows the teacher to work with students and families to ensure students remain up to date on assignments.
- She expressed concern that school boards and administrators may have difficulty determining which events are partisan and which are not.
- She expressed concern about the definition of civic events and characterized it as broad.

Neutral Information Presented: None.

TC

Date Hearing Report completed: April 10, 2026