

Senate Judiciary Committee

Brendan Bunnell 271-4063

HB 1576-FN, relative to the enforcement of criminal restitution obligations.

Hearing Date: April 7, 2026

Time Opened: 2:00 p.m.

Time Closed: 2:31 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Gannon, Abbas, Altschiller and Reardon

Members of the Committee Absent: Senator Carson

Bill Analysis: This bill provides for new mechanisms for the enforcement of criminal restitution obligations, including mandatory financial reevaluation and additional penalties for noncompliance.

Sponsors:

Rep. Paquette

Rep. Cole

Rep. Dupont

Rep. Gagne

Rep. Kesselring

Rep. Korzen

Rep. McGrath

Rep. McLean

Rep. Morton

Rep. Grill

Sen. Innis

Sen. Sullivan

Who supports the bill: Senator Daniel Innis, Representative Terri O'Rorke, Cory Stone, Frances Strayer, Jackie Whatmough, Elizabeth Morse, Sandra Greenfield, Martha Dickey, Christine LaCourse, Mary McGahan, Susan Seeley, Kate Harrison, Carole Hunt, Stephanie Callahan, Noah Stanton, Judy Wilbur-Albertson, Lisa Crossland, Rachel Henba, Meredith Connor, Matthew Brown, Raetha Stoddard, Mark Millet, Patricia Glowa MD, Peter Doucette and Regina Eckrich.

Who opposes the bill: None.

Who is neutral on the bill: None.

Summary of the testimony presented:

Representative Kathleen Paquette introduced the bill. She explained that restitution is a critical part of the criminal justice process and is intended to help victims recover from the financial harm of a crime. The representative stated that this bill would strengthen existing statutes without changing restitution amounts or creating new obligations.

- Explained that the bill would strengthen the provisions of RSA 651:63 to improve how court-ordered restitution is managed after it is ordered by the court.
- Explained that the bill would establish annual financial reviews of offenders where currently no such process exists; ensuring that changes in financial circumstances, including an increase income, are reflected in the payment arrangements.
- Explained that the bill would strengthen enforcement by providing additional tools to collect restitution when an individual has the ability to pay but chooses not to.
- Explained that the bill would improve transparency and communication for victims. The bill would inform victims what amount has been collected on their behalf, what has been dispersed, and provide a notification when there are disruptions or delays in payment. The representative explained that there is currently no consistent information shared with victims; leaving them without a clear understanding of the restitution process.
- Stated that victims are sometimes left trying to track down payments, seek updates, and to understand what's happening with already collected funds. The representative argued that this burden does not belong with the victims, but with the State.
- Explained that the bill reinforces that funds are expected to be delivered in a timely and consistent manner to victims once collected. There had been extended periods in 2025 and 2026 where funds were collected but not dispersed to victims, due to issues with an updated software system. This resulted in 3 million dollars in funds held without being dispersed for many months and in some cases near a year. The representative explained that this bill would establish a clear time frame for when funds must be dispersed.
- Stated that this bill would restore confidence in a process that 13,000 victims of crime in New Hampshire rely upon.
- Senator Reardon stated that the bill places the responsibility for enforcing payments with the Department of Corrections, and asked whether there had been a conversation with the department in regards to their ability to complete these tasks.
 - The representative answered that there had been, and that it was a process which they are already engaged in.
- Senator Abbas asked about the mandate within the bill that any adjustment will apply retroactively to the date of the increase, expressing that an individual

could have been paying into this restitution for years already. He asked whether there had been a discussion around this language in the House.

- o The representative stated that the intention was to allow for reassessments in value and changing financial circumstances since the last assessment to be taken into account retroactively.
- Senator Altschiller stated that the bill acknowledges that, although the court might order an individual to make payments, restitution is not always paid and that this bill would provide a greater capacity to enforce that process. The senator asked for confirmation that any delay in payment would immediately trigger a notification for the individual receiving the payments.
 - o The representative confirmed both statements as correct.

Pamela Keillig and Meg Chant, representatives of the Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, spoke in support of the bill. Ms. Keillig stated that this bill was a common-sense update to a statute that hasn't been updated in 30 years and highlighted the importance of upholding a crime victim's bill of rights.

- Ms. Keillig stated that this bill would ensure that victims receive the information they need to be empowered and engaged as part of the healing process, while ensuring that offenders are being held accountable as part of the rehabilitation process.
- Stated that every state has a crime victim's bill of rights and that these rights allow victims to be heard, informed, protected during legal proceedings, and to rebuild their lives after a traumatic event. Ms. Keillig argued that not upholding these rights was detrimental to the criminal justice system in New Hampshire.
- Stated that other states, including Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Maine, all have laws with protocols and swift timelines for holding offenders that fail to meet restitution accountable. She argued that this bill would update New Hampshire law to bring it into alignment with best practices from other states.
- Ms. Meg Chant stated that how a victim heals from trauma is deeply impacted by the people and systems that they connect with after the crime. She argued that failing to ensure that victims are given adequate notification or receive their restitution payments violates their rights while revictimizing them. She explained that victims of crime in New Hampshire have a statutory right to restitution.
- Stated that this bill will address the current shortfalls in the law that have left victims behind.

Jessica Kuron, Assistant Commissioner for the New Hampshire Department of Corrections, spoke in support of the bill. She explained that her department was supportive of any effort to provide them with additional tools and resources and to ensure that victims of crime receive timely payments and clear communication.

- Explained that the DOC currently manages 13,000 active restitution cases for 21,000 victims; all of whom would benefit from this legislation.
- Stated that these cases are managed by only 4 corrections officers, when there had previously been 11 positions dedicated to this work a decade prior. She argued that this is not nearly enough manpower to manage the case load they currently have.
- Explained that the bill would require the DOC to monitor changes in offender financial circumstances, initiate enforcement actions when non-compliance is identified, and to coordinate referrals for criminal prosecution.
- Explained that her department currently estimates that 16% of offenders have not made a payment towards restitution orders in 60 days or more. This translates to approximately 8,000 non-compliant offenders with only four collections officers to monitor their location, employment, and current financial circumstances. She explained that these four officers are responsible for prosecuting these cases by working with legal staff, who also lack sufficient staffing, initiate enforcement actions, and to engage with the court attorney's offices for these 8,000 cases.
- Stated that while her department should be doing better supporting victims in New Hampshire, it is an impossible task for only four officers to manage.
- Explained that several provisions of the bill are not currently supported by the DOC's offender management software and that they anticipate that the work would require outside vendor support. She stated that they were not currently able to estimate the cost of this support.
- Senator Altschiller asked whether the four collections officers were all full-time employees.
 - o Ms. Kuron stated that three were full time and that one officer was part-time.
- Senator Altschiller asked whether the fourth position would need to become full-time were this bill to pass, and for clarification on the current composition of the individuals working on this issue.
 - o Ms. Kuron stated that they were requesting three additional full time collections officers and one accountant, to be placed in the finance

division, in the bill's fiscal note. She also clarified that the part-time position was a case manager, and that the four individuals did not currently include an accountant.

- Senator Reardon asked about the issues with the department's current software, and if there were other existing databases that might be helpful to their work.
 - Ms. Kuron stated that they were currently looking into other options and that they would have more news to share on this point in the coming days and weeks.
- Senator Abbas asked for clarification on the wage garnishment process and how the department approaches that task.
 - Ms. Kuron stated that probation officers are able to work with employers in some circumstances with withhold funding from checks, but that many offenders are not working with companies and are instead being paid under the table. She clarified that if an offender is employed with a business, the department is able to work directly with those companies.
- Senator Abbas asked whether the interception of tax refunds was the same at the state level and if there was any internal work done or just a simple notification to the department of revenue.
 - Ms. Kuron answered that she believed it was the latter, and that they would work with their state partners to ensure that tax revenues were being withheld.

Steve Endres, an attorney, spoke in support of the legislation. He stated that restitution was a good way for victims to get compensation that would otherwise have to be gained via a civil lawsuit.

- Stated that when he hears the Assistant Commissioner indicate that there are currently 21,000 victims entitled to restitution, that means that there are 21,000 less small claims and civil suites in the state to recover that amount. He argued that it made sense then that the restitution statute would somewhat mirror the civil statutes in terms of allowing costs and interest, motions for periodic payment, post judgement attachment of property, and keeping victims informed.
 - Senator Abbas asked whether the DOC would need to be given some level of additional authority in regards to the interception of tax refunds.
- Mr. Endres stated that he was unsure, and also that he was unsure whether the interception of tax refunds would be intercepting in the sense that the federal government would send them to the department or interception in that you would tell the offender to provide their tax refund.

Merill Beauchamp, Director of the Victim Witness Program at the Hillsborough County Attorney's Office, and **Nicole Kippnut**, who previously worked as a victim advocate with the Department of Corrections and privately for victim prevention education, spoke in support of the bill. Both individuals had worked as a victim advocate for the last 18 years.

- Ms. Beauchamp stated that the obligation to restitution is a significant and impactful part of a sentence for recovering victims. She explained that, when this process is unfulfilled and not clearly communicated, victims are retraumatized and revictimized during a phase in the criminal justice system that should be focused on providing relief and healing.
- Stated that it is not uncommon for victims to reach out to her office after a criminal case has resolved, seeking information and assistance because they have not received a restitution payment or information regarding the status of a collection.
- Stated that victims will sometimes contact them, frustrated at having received one or two payments and then complete silence for months thereafter. Victims also express frustration at there being no tangible consequences for offenders who do not comply with court-ordered restitution.
- Argued that closure is sometimes not possible for many victims who experience restitution collections that fail or drag on. She stated that these victims deserve information, notification, and for restitution to serve its purpose of making them whole again.
- Ms. Kippnut explained that she was a survivor of a crime herself and had previously received financial restitution.
- Argued that restitution is fundamentally different from other financial obligations ordered by the court, as it is owed directly to the victim, an individual who did not ask to be there.
- Stated that being a victim of a crime is itself very expensive. She stated that she is aware of countless individuals who have struggled with this, including those that have lost their savings and retirement funds and those that have sustained injuries that may require lifelong care.
- Stated that restitution, when done well, benefits not only the victim but the offender by reinforcing accountability and responsibility for the harm that they cause.
- Stated that one of the most significant challenges she had observed was the lack of accountability once individuals were released onto parole. When incarcerated, the DOC would automatically deduct 10% out of their inmate account, but this

10% would no longer be deducted once on parole. These payments would often no longer occur and parole officers would collect sometimes as low as 25 dollars a month just to ensure that restitution checks were being issued.

- Expressed her support for the language requiring offenders to promptly notify the DOC of changes in their ability to pay restitution outside the reevaluation period.
- Stated that the offender has a responsibility to make amends just as the DOC has a responsibility to ensure payments are collected in a timely and consistent manner. She argued that this reflects a commitment to victim-centered justice that would build trust in the system.

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Date Hearing Report completed: April 10, 2026