

# Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

*Jessica Bourque 271-2104*

**HB 1526**, relative to the adopting of a municipal budget committee and electing members thereof.

**Hearing Date:** April 14, 2026

**Time Opened:** 10:03 a.m.

**Time Closed:** 10:23 a.m.

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

**Members of the Committee Absent :** None

**Bill Analysis:** This bill:

I. Modifies the procedure for adopting, rescinding, and electing a municipal budget committee.

II. Modifies the time frame for the appointment of initial members of a cooperative school district budget committee.

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**Sponsors:**

Rep. Wherry

Rep. Pauer

Rep. Burnham

Rep. Wood

Rep. Sellers

Rep. Freeman

Rep. Mary Murphy

Rep. DeRoy

Rep. Tom Mannion

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**Who supports the bill:** Rep. Robert Wherry, Eric Pauer, Curtis Howland, Timothy Finney, Pamela Harders

**Who opposes the bill:** William Copeland Jr, Priscilla Dube, Joyce Weston, Julie Retelle, Stephanie Osborne, Richard Osborne, Carol Lenahan, Sally Widerstrom, Janet Lucas, Sheila Donahue, Nancy Donahue, Jennifer Highland, Lisa Day-Copeland, Richard Hunnewell, Gary McCool

**Who is neutral on the bill:** None

**Summary of testimony presented:**

**Representative Bob Wherry, Prime Sponsor, Hillsborough-District 13**

- This bill aims to clarify the procedures for adoption and rescission of the municipal budget, address membership details, and improve language clarity throughout.
- Budget committees play a unique role in representing the local taxpayer by conducting detailed review and analysis of revenues and expenditures.
- Rep. Wherry noted that budget committees can defend the town's budget, having thoroughly reviewed proposals, and can provide information to taxpayers and other interested parties during public hearings. On the other hand, they represent the taxpayer and seek opportunities to reduce costs.
- Rep. Wherry outlined the bill's structure:
  - Section One addresses wording for adoption.
  - Section Two addresses wording for rescission.
  - Section Three addresses membership aspects.
  - Final two sections address clerical matters.
- Rep. Wherry deferred to Mr. Pauer's testimony for more in-depth answers to the committee's questions.

**Senator Lang** asked for clarification on the problem the bill seeks to address.

**Rep. Wherry** noted there were problems with existing language, and people have had challenges figuring out how to adopt or rescind a budget committee. This bill aims to make the wording clearer to facilitate adoption.

**Brody Deshaies, NH Municipal Association (NHMA)**

- Opposed to this bill.
- There is already a well-established process in statute for creating a municipal budget committee with existing language that allows flexibility for municipalities and petitioners.
- Under this bill, the question would be mandated to be placed on the official ballot rather than taken up at the business session, which would limit debate and circumvent the existing form of town meeting.
- Section One repeals and replaces straightforward existing language in RSA 32:14 with a new and less clear process, requiring one of four prescribed questions by law on the official ballot, which could create confusion and questions about whether votes would be binding.
- Section Two prescribes a question for rescinding a budget committee, raising similar concerns as Section One.
- Section Three has a concerning outcome in that voters could adopt a budget committee with no active members to carry out its statutory requirements under RSA 32, and the current language in the bill does not adequately address this.

- Section Five repeals RSA 32:14, which is the existing statute that allows municipalities to amend the number of members on the budget committee and whether they are elected or appointed.
- Mr. Deshaies questioned what compelling need there is for this bill when existing law already allows for the adoption and rescission of budget committees and provides latitude for binding questions on the warrant.

**Senator Rochefort** stated that he has not heard from any of his 50-plus towns that this is a problem and questioned whether it is an issue specific to one or two municipalities.

**Mr. Deshaies** responded that he has seen no evidence of issues in any municipality regarding the adoption or rescission of budget committees and reiterated that the prescribed language in this bill could create confusion, particularly in traditional town meeting towns, where questions may not align perfectly with it, potentially making votes non-binding.

**Senator Rochefort** added that in Littleton, he had only four warrant questions about gambling, and it caused confusion.

**Mr. Deshaies** said that most people don't consult the RSAs when they write a petition to adopt a policy or to instruct their governing body on what to do.

#### **Eric Pauer, NH School Governance Association**

- In favor of this bill.
- In 2020, Brookline was considering adopting a budget committee, and Mr. Pauer was appointed Chair of the Budget Committee Study Committee, giving him extensive experience in discussions with peer towns about the process.
- Found that the process for adopting and rescinding budget committees is very confusing, and that has not changed in the past five to six years.
- Provided seven recent examples of budget committee proposals that were not on target due to ambiguous language in RSA 32
- The current process places a burden on the moderator to follow up on decisions about the number of members, whether members are elected or appointed, and how elections are conducted.
- This bill clarifies the wording so that governing bodies and petitioners know exactly how to proceed in charter towns, traditional towns, and SB2 towns.
- In Atkinson and Pittsfield, a warrant article to rescind an official budget committee and replace it with an advisory committee. That is a challenge because voters can rescind the official committee, but not establish an advisory one. The bill aims to clarify this process.
- Inconsistency between cooperative school districts and all other budget committees regarding the appointment timeline will be clarified in this bill.

- Adoption and rescission of a budget committee is a substantial issue. Chairman Diane Pauer came up with a list of 80 warrant articles that go on the official ballot and carry more weight than other articles. These articles deserve maximum participation, and this bill will enable it.

**Senator Gray** asked whether Mr. Pauer would consider any changes discussed in Mr. Deshaies' testimony on behalf of NHMA.

**Mr. Pauer** replied that he did not have anything in mind but noted that questions can always be amended in a deliberative session under SB 2. He stated that he believes the bill is good as is but added that he would be happy to help with an amendment if the committee sees something that needs to be changed.

**Senator Gray** stated that he would like to listen to all who have testified and take their testimony under thoughtful consideration.

**Mr. Pauer** mentioned a specific situation where, in an SB 2 town with a budget committee, the governing body might prefer not to have a moderator appoint the initial members. They could choose to postpone forming the budget committee until the next annual meeting. That part could be clarified, but Mr. Pauer doesn't see that as a big issue.

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Date Hearing Report completed: April 16, 2026