

Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

Jessica Bourque 271-2104

HB 1604-FN, requiring suitable public facilities such as schools and town halls be made available as polling places upon request by local election officials.

Hearing Date: April 14, 2026

Time Opened: 9:16 a.m.

Time Closed: 9:25 a.m.

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

Members of the Committee Absent: Senator Perkins Kwoka

Bill Analysis: This bill requires suitable public facilities such as schools and town halls be made available as polling places upon request by local election officials.

Sponsors:

Rep. Guzofski
Rep. See
Rep. Muirhead

Rep. Berry
Rep. Wherry

Rep. Qualey
Rep. Burnham

Who supports the bill: Rep. Jim Guzofski, Rep. Robert Wherry, Sarah Burke Cohen

Who opposes the bill: None

Who is neutral on the bill: None

Summary of testimony presented:

Representative James Guzofski, Prime Sponsor, Rockingham-District 1

- This bill amends RSA 658:9, requiring that once a polling location is identified by the selectman or other town officers, the location cannot deny its use as a polling location.
- In 2023, Northwood held a special election, but the town's long-standing election site was no longer available to host it.
- This bill is about ensuring access to elections, not about commandeering public property.
- Schools and libraries can still operate normally, and the town would cover any associated costs, such as cleanup, etc.

Senator Long raised a concern about fire stations being included on line 11, noting that fire stations deal with emergencies and should remain clear.

Rep. Guzofski stated that the bill's language evolved from a general reference to publicly owned facilities, but the House Election Law Committee decided to name specific facilities.

Senator Lang asked why charter schools are included in the bill and explained that charter schools are technically public schools, but they are not publicly owned buildings.

Rep. Guzofski responded that when the House Election Committee amended the bill, they added that. Rep. Guzofski expressed openness to removing them if necessary.

Senator Lang expressed concern about the inclusion of non-publicly owned property and noted that regional and cooperative school districts need sufficient time to coordinate.

Rep. Guzofski stated the bill is about making locations available to ensure elections are held safely and properly. Rep. Guzofski reiterated that he is open to amendments.

Senator Gray expressed concerns about logistical issues such as security and cleaning, especially if a school cafeteria/gymnasium is the only available space, which could cause disruptions. For instance, relying exclusively on a cafeteria/gymnasium might lead to complications.

Rep. Guzofski acknowledged the bill was intended to be broader because it is difficult to address every situation.

Senator Gray asked whether Rep. Guzofski would be opposed to adding a one-year notice requirement.

Rep. Guzofski said he would not be opposed to that.

Senator Gray explained that school calendars are finalized well in advance of a school year, and if something is scheduled on a day when a special election is scheduled, it would be difficult for the school to accommodate.