

Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

Jessica Bourque 271-2104

HB 1224, relative to the default budget for official ballot town meetings.

Hearing Date: April 21, 2026

Time Opened: 11:01 a.m.

Time Closed: 11:12 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 amends the definition of default budget to include salary and benefit reductions of vacant positions, subject to an exception.

Sponsors:

Rep. Dunn

Rep. Alexander Jr.

Rep. Ankarberg

Rep. Aures

Rep. Colcombe

Rep. DeRoy

Rep. Harvey-Bolia

Rep. Pauer

Rep. Perez

Rep. Wood

Who supports the bill: Rep. Ron Dunn, Rep. Juliet Harvey-Bolia, Rep. Diane Pauer, Eric Pauer, Julie Smith, Judith Saum, Thomas Humphreys, Brad Louth

Who opposes the bill: Linda Burnap, Lois Cote, William Copeland Jr, Mary Till, Charlotte Lesser, Erin Kerwin, Janet Robertson, Joyce Weston, Priscilla Dube, Valerie Scarborough, Abigail Mather, Sarah Thorne, Debra Rodd, Daniel Rodd, Joanne Lazarus, Richard Krauss, Gretchen Kast, Andrea Powers, Chip McGee, Ms Atinuke Cahill, Naomi Bolton, Deborah Fexis, Richard Hunnewell, Rep. Diane Pauer, Anne Hunnewell, Barbara Langworthy, Karen Collman, Steven Zeimetz, Tami Lanzillo Zeimetz, James Moore, Patricia Hunt, Lisa Willis, Rosemary D'Arcy, Andrew Harmon, Susan Moore, Patricia Kellogg, Gary McCool

Who is neutral on the bill: None

Summary of testimony presented:

Representative Ron Dunn, Rockingham - District 16

- Complaints about budgets have not yet produced good policy solutions.

- This bill would address unfilled positions under default budgets to fund other areas of the budget and eliminate this practice.
- If filling a position is necessary, then it should be filled. If it is not needed, then it should be eliminated.
- The practice of including unfilled positions in default budgets leads to a lack of trust and transparency.
- Believes that this is one step in the right direction to improve default budget issues.

Julia Harvey-Bolia, Belknap-District 3

- Supports the bill.
- Stated that any reforms addressing default budget problems should be supported.

Brian Hawkins, NEA-NH

- Opposed to the bill.
- Stated it would make hiring more difficult.
- Cited the Governor's veto comments on a similar bill, where she described it as an unnecessary overreach by the state into municipal and school affairs.
- Noted that the bill added only an exception for public safety positions, not for schools.
- Stated that there are already hiring shortages in education, and this will make it even more difficult.

Eric Pauer, School District Governance Association

- Supported the bill.
- Spoke from a school district perspective.
- Default budgets are a problem in the NH. He has spoken with the Department of Revenue Administration (DRA), and this is the number-one question they are asked.
- Default budgets shouldn't include unfilled positions.
- This year, a proposed budget increase from Derry schools, which went from \$113.4 million to a default budget of \$113.7 million, even after losing students, the default budget should not have unfilled positions being paid out.
- The bill will help default budgets become a basic budget.

Brodie Deshaies, NH Municipal Association

- Opposes the bill.
- The default budget is not necessarily supposed to be a bare-bones budget. It is supposed to reflect the adjusted contractual obligations approved by other political subdivisions.

- This would make hiring more difficult.
- Increasing wages is more important than restricting hiring authority.
- The bill creates vague language and misconstrues the line of transfers for calculations.
- Contradicts RSA 32:10-b, which states that “neither the budget committee nor other citizens shall have any authority to dispute or challenge the discretion of the governing body in making such transfers.” This recognizes that the selectboard needs some flexibility to address a town’s needs.