

Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

Jessica Bourque 271-2104

HB 1331, enabling the Derry town council to incorporate the Derry Cooperative School District as a department of the town through a charter amendment.

Hearing Date: April 28, 2026

Time Opened: 10:52 a.m.

Time Closed: 11:08 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 enables the Derry town council to incorporate the Derry Cooperative School District as a department of the town through a charter amendment.

Sponsors:

Rep. Layon

Rep. Love

Rep. Potucek

Rep. Tripp

Who supports the bill: Rep. Erica Layon, Jim Webb, Brian Chirichiello, Eric Pauer, Tracy Zysk

Who opposes the bill: Stacy Snell, Yara McSweeney, Dan Watkins, Jessica Cone, Michelle Moge, Daniel Moge, Jan Jacome, Keri Fongemie, Andrew Fongemie, Tami Lanzillo Zeimetz, Emily Napoli, Samantha Rodrigues, Dorianne Haverty, Jonathan Dugan, Jennifer Paradise, Lisa Willis, Kathleen Malsbenden, Amanda Collum, Joe Collum, Robert Tompkins, Jillian Thiele

Who is neutral on the bill: No one

Summary of testimony presented:

Representative Erica Layon, Rockingham-District 13

- In the 1950's, the Derry school district was permitted to move from a standard district to a cooperative school district. Derry was the first cooperative school district.
- In 1963, laws were enacted to govern cooperative school districts, and any district that was already set up as a cooperative district was grandfathered in from the cooperative school district laws and rules.

- As a cooperative school district, they face significant restrictions on placing articles on the ballot. They would need to secure twice as many votes as the current voter turnout at the local level. Reaching out to 20,000 voters presents a considerable challenge.
- Without permission from the state, Derry schools cannot change. The state would allow Derry voters to choose.

Brian Chirichiello, Derry

- Derry is a unique town, and the town council has full control. It operates very similarly to a city but is still called a town.
- People don't show up because the budget process is confusing for the average person to follow.
- Derry is the fourth-largest town in the state.
- There isn't much transparency on the school side. There have been instances where schools don't post the actual budget.
- Derry taxpayers will face a heavy burden in December, primarily because of the schools.

Jim Webb, Derry

- Supports this bill.
- This is asking the state for permission to allow voters to vote on their budget and taxes.
- Many people on a fixed income struggle. This is part of the solution.
- Derry has a lot of things to do. Test scores are among the lowest in the state.
- They do not advertise school elections.

Michael Thiele, School Board Chair, Derry Cooperative School District

- Opposes this bill.
- There was a referendum in Derry that passed 597-547, well below the threshold.
- The relationship between the school and the town council has improved markedly over the past several years.
- There are several alternatives to this bill that Derry could adopt, such as establishing a budget committee or approving a tax cap.
- This is trying to solve a problem that does not exist. A system is already in place.