

Senate Finance Committee

Deb Martone 271-4980

SB 117-FN-A, making an appropriation to the department of education to fund the online tutoring program.

Hearing Date: January 28, 2025

Time Opened: 2:42 p.m.

Time Closed: 3:04 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Gray, Innis, Birdsell, Pearl, Lang, Rosenwald and Watters

Members of the Committee Absent: Senator Carson

Bill Analysis: This bill makes an appropriation of \$1,000,000 to the department of education to fund the online tutoring program, Tutor.com.

Sponsors:

Sen. Innis

Sen. Gannon

Sen. Watters

Sen. Sullivan

Sen. Ward

Sen. McGough

Sen. Ricciardi

Who supports the bill: Senators Gannon and McGough; Lauren Lobdell; Mark Maclean; Chase Eagleson; Curtis Register.

Who opposes the bill: Senator Debra Altschiller; Linda Burnap; Amy Erickson; Jesse Medeiros; Curtis Howland; Kate Coon; Ruth O'Neal; Laura Condon; Kay Campbell; Lois Cote; Joan Tulk; Claudia Istel; Bonnie Bruno; Peg Sheets.

Who is neutral on the bill: Melissa White

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Innis, Prime Sponsor:

- The program was started three years ago with \$3.7 million from ARPA, which was allocated for elementary and secondary school relief funding. These funds helped start the program, which is available to every student statewide. There are at least two school districts in each Senate district using this program, along with some private schools.
- The program has seen significant growth each year and will continue to grow if it remains. The annual cost to run the program going forward will be much lower than it was previously, at \$500,000 a year over the next two years.
- Senator Rosenwald inquired whether Senator Innis had any thoughts about appropriating taxpayer money directly to for-profit companies instead of letting the

free market work its way. Senator Innis stated that it could be argued that the specific program was selected through an open process, and the reason for continuing with them is based on their performance. He agreed with the free-market argument but directed Sen. Rosenwald's question to the Department of Education.

- To gain clarity, Senator Rosenwald asked if Senator Innis had any concerns about the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) having influence over the education of children in New Hampshire. Tutor.com is owned by Chinese nationals, and this question was asked in reference to the CCP's declaration that all companies owned by Chinese nationals are property of the CCP. Senator Innis responded by saying there are multiple ways to answer the question, and one way is to look at the performance of the company and decide whether or not it is working to improve student outcomes. He finds it unlikely that this program will be used to indoctrinate children into thinking like communists. He also stated that this program is much different from TikTok in that it is not feeding young people algorithms of information and content that we do not want them to get, and he emphasized that the program is controlled by the Department of Education.
- Senator Rosenwald asked if Senator Innis is concerned that the company that owns Tutor.com is also an investor in the parent company of TikTok. Senator Innis stated that he is not concerned, as they are separate operations. He then stated that the fact that they are an investor does not mean they are pulling the TikTok algorithm into the Tutor.com platform.

Lauren Lobdell, Vice President of Customer Success, Tutor.com:

- Ms. Lobdell's team is primarily responsible for working with the DOE, SAUs, and other member schools in the state to implement and roll out the program to students and parents. She emphasized that Tutor.com was incorporated in New York City in 1999 and is an American company subject to American laws.
- The company does have a financial investor, but this investor is not an operational investor. The investor does not have access to their security systems. When Tutor.com was acquired by this company, they pursued a regulatory review process with the federal government through the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), which found that there were no national security issues with the organization. They possess a binding national security agreement with a whole litany of national security and data protection policies in place. New Hampshire-based data privacy agreements were also signed with every school that the program works with in the state. Ms. Lobdell stated that there is no way the parent company could or would get access to any data.
- Tutor.com is in support of SB 117-FN-A to continue working with the DOE and member schools that have partnered with the program, as well as serving students not in participating schools. They currently support students in grades 4-12 and adult education students with 24/7 on-demand, online tutoring.
- Students not attending a school that is partnered with the program can access the service through a self-registration website with parental consent. Students in participating schools utilize direct integrations where the company embeds the service within the systems of student coursework at no cost to the school.

- Tutor.com has worked with organizations around the country for over 25 years and currently works with eight statewide programs. With the support of the Department of Defense, the program is available to all military families. Ms. Lobdell stated that all of the mentioned agencies and institutions have put Tutor.com through rigorous standards and vetting.
- The services offered by this program include 24/7 online tutoring access to assist with homework and essays relating to any area of academics. The program has over 4,000 tutors with subject matter expertise in all domains who provide a safe learning environment online. The program also provides SAT educational resources, which can save schools and districts money on providing educational material.
- Over the past three years in New Hampshire, the program has over a hundred school districts and has built strong relationships while continuing to grow each year. While there were lots of initial startup costs associated with building a website for the state and rolling out the program, costs have since been brought way down.
- Senator Watters asked whether or not Tutor.com could provide a number of discrete users that use the program, given that they provided a chart with their testimony showing the total number of sessions the program sees month to month. Ms. Lobdell stated that Tutor.com is able to provide such figures and will.
- Senator Watters then asked whether Tutor.com provides reporting and analysis of results to the DOE. Ms. Lobdell stated that Tutor.com provides aggregate data weekly to track activity at schools and with the self-registration program. No study on efficacy has been done in New Hampshire, though independent studies with third parties have been done on Tutor.com and found measurable improvements in student performance.

Mark Maclane, Executive Director, New Hampshire School Administrators Association:

- The association represents school leaders from around New Hampshire and supports SB 117-FN-A. They recognize that Tutor.com offers a great opportunity to students and educators.
- Senator Watters asked if any schools or this association had done any evaluation of the effectiveness of this program for individual students across disciplines. Mr. Maclane stated that such an evaluation would be anecdotal and too closely connected to ongoing schoolwork. He stated that measuring any education initiative is difficult because it is hard to distinguish between what is causal and what is corollary.
- Senator Rosenwald indicated according to a superintendent in her district, students in Nashua use this program mostly for SAT prep, although they have access to another non-profit. She then asked Mr. Maclane whether he had any information regarding the performance of Tutor.com in comparison to a non-profit program like Khan Academy. He told her that he could not provide an answer to that question and deferred the question to Tutor.com.

Neutral Information Presented:

Melissa White, Division Director for Learner Support, New Hampshire Department of Education:

- The Department of Education received COVID-19 relief funds. One requirement of these funds was to address learning loss, so the department released a request for proposals to seek out services for online tutoring. The department received a number of proposals from various vendors, and Tutor.com won that proposal.
- Senator Birdsell asked Ms. White to explain the methodology of the fiscal note, which states that the current contract with the Princeton Review for Tutor.com is \$1,600,000 per year. Therefore, the funding in this bill is insufficient by \$1,100,000 in each FY 2026 and FY 2027. Ms. White explained that the analysis was done on the current cost of the program, as no talks or negotiations have been made regarding the future costs of the program. The \$500,000 per year put forth in this bill does not cover the current contract cost of \$1.6 million per year.
- Senator Birdsell stated that the bill only has \$1 million appropriated for this biennium despite the current contract being worth \$1.6 million, indicating that the bill would not be sufficient to cover the program. Senator Gray then stated that, as put forth in Ms. Lobdell's testimony, there were significant startup costs, which may be able to bring the contract down to \$500,000 per year.
- Senator Gray asked whether the Department of Education has prioritized this program in the state budget that is being submitted. Ms. White stated that it was not included as a prioritized need in the budget.
- Senator Watters asked if there had been any evaluation by the department on the effectiveness of the program. Ms. White responded by saying that while looking at test scores, they cannot attribute an impact on statewide assessment scores specifically to the usage of this particular service. DOE does not have any data to show the efficacy of the product and its support services. DOE does meet with Tutor.com bi-weekly to go over usage, subject areas, and obtain comments from students who are utilizing the service, though this information is anecdotal.

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Date Hearing Report completed: February 1, 2025