

# Senate Education Committee

*Ryan Meleedy 271-4151*

**SB 69-LOCAL**, relative to acceptance of or rejection of charitable contributions, gifts, or donations by local school boards.

**Hearing Date:** January 28, 2025

**Members of the Committee Present:** Senators Ward, Sullivan, Abbas, Prentiss and Altschiller

**Members of the Committee Absent :** None

**Bill Analysis:** This bill requires local school boards to discuss and vote in public session before rejecting any charitable contribution, gift, or donation.

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**Sponsors:**

Sen. Murphy

Sen. Innis

Sen. Avard

Rep. Ladd

Rep. Alexander Jr.

Rep. Mazur

Rep. Osborne

Rep. Seidel

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**Who supports the bill:** Senator Keith Murphy (16), Rep. Joe Alexander, Rep. Lisa Mazur, Rep. Sherri Reinfurt, and Cindy Kudlik.

**Who opposes the bill:** Curtis Register.

**Who is neutral on the bill:** No one signed in neutrality to this bill.

**Summary of testimony presented in support:**

**Senator Keith Murphy**

- Senator Murphy testified in support of Senate Bill 69-L as the bill's prime sponsor.
- Senator Murphy established that the bill originated in response to an event that took place in Goffstown, NH. A school administrator opted to turn down a donation from a local church that would have provided enough funds to cover the school lunch debt of multiple students in the district and deliberately took the families to court over the dispute.
- Senator Murphy explained that the bill is non-partisan and seeks to hold school administrators accountable for their decisions regarding donation denial.
- Senator Murphy established that there was no public hearing involved with the Goffstown administrator's decision to deny the donation and that there is no

documentation of the school administrator consulting with the school board before making the decision.

- Senator Murphy explained that Senate Bill 69-L would require school administrators to have a public hearing before finalizing any decision to deny donations of a similar nature. He explained that this bill would by no means prevent the administrator from denying donations and mentioned that there are often donations that should be denied. However, holding public hearings provides some accountability to the community, considering the administrators are not publicly elected officials.
- Senator Altschiller expressed agreement with Senator Murphy about his opinion in how the Goffstown situation was handled. She raised a question as to whether he saw state involvement as necessary when the towns could just make their own policies.
  - o Senator Murphy said that he was in agreement with the idea of less state involvement, but that in situations like these, it is important for the state to step up and demand some form of accountability. He emphasized that the state would not be requiring the acceptance of any donations but would require the schools to at least tell their people why they are denying them.
- Senator Sullivan asked if this would be enabling legislation. Senator Murphy explained that it would likely put more pressure on school districts to accept a wider range of donations, but he saw it as a way to force school administrations to at least develop a policy surrounding donations and their denial/acceptance. He drew reference to the case in Goffstown, where part of the excuse to deny the donations without consulting with the school board or the public was that there was no policy in place to determine the correct path of action. Senator Murphy said he viewed this as a sort of method to shift blame away from the administrator, who, in his mind, had gone against the interest of Goffstown's students and their families.
- Senator Prentiss drew attention to a similar scenario that took place in Keene, NH, soon after what happened in Goffstown. Although the Keene school administrator ultimately did not decide to sue, they chose to deny a donation without any public accountability that would have helped less fortunate students. She cited this occurrence as more evidence of the bill's importance.
- Senator Abbas asked if, in most towns in New Hampshire, there is a policy on voting to accept or deny donation offers for Police and Fire Departments.
  - o Senator Murphy said that this is extremely common throughout the state and that there was no reason that school administrators should not face the same public accountability in their decision-making regarding donations.
- Senator Altschiller asked about potentially amending the bill to force administrators to hold public hearings even when they accept donations to

potentially incentivize other community members to offer contributions to the school system.

- Senator Murphy was open to this idea and said that he wouldn't have any personal reservations about adding such an amendment.
- Senator Abbas asked that if Senator Altschiller's idea for an amendment were to come to fruition, it could potentially single out lower-income students to whom the donations were directed.
  - Senator Murphy said that he could see this being a potential issue but that he would leave this decision up to the committee. He reemphasized that no matter what, administrators should be held accountable by the public for denials specifically.