

Senate Education Committee

Ryan Meleedy 271-4151

HB 292, establishing a commission to study school administrative unit consolidation.

Hearing Date: April 15, 2025

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

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill creates a commission to study the issue of school administrative unit consolidation.

Sponsors:
Rep. Ladd

Who supports the bill: 24 People signed in support of House Bill 292. To access the full list, please contact the committee aide (ryan.meleedy@gc.nh.gov).

Who opposes the bill: 67 People signed in opposition to House Bill 292. To access the full list, please contact the committee aide (ryan.meleedy@gc.nh.gov).

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

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Representative Glenn Cordelli

- Representative Cordelli established that his county, with 4,500 students, has four School Administrative Units (SAUs).
- Representative Cordelli expressed that this intends to examine the possibility of consolidating SAUs, and the amended version outlines the commission's scope and charge.
- He established that legislation was passed last year that established a process for merging SAUs and included an incentive attached. However, a study committee is necessary to bring together key stakeholders to examine the issue further and investigate possible savings and efficiencies produced by the possible consolidation of SAUs.
- Senator Ward asked why the number of SAUs went from 53 to 107. Representative Cordelli responded that in some cases, it was because some SAUs

wished to be independent. He said that other states have attempted to merge SAUs, and it is worth examining whether merging SAUs would yield savings and efficiencies in New Hampshire.

- Senator Altschiller established that a Senate Bill addressing the same issue was passed, and it appears that in this bill, the commission's duties have a predetermined outcome with a single SAU per county model. She also expressed concern that the county officials are not included as members of the commission. She asked how these issues were missed in the amendment from the House. Representative Cordelli expressed that under duties, it talks about looking at research around consolidation and determining if there would be efficiencies. A per-county consolidation was one option for the committee to examine, and the amendment addressed this by carving out Manchester and Nashua and adding criteria for highly populated counties. Specifically, on line 14, on page 2, it says except for counties exceeding 100,000 residents.

Representative Paul Terry

- Representative Terry expressed that his personal interpretation of the bill, as written, would allow for a study committee to conclude with a report recommending an alternative model to the one cited explicitly in the bill. He explained that he does not believe the bill restrains the study committee's ability to examine alternatives.
- Senator Altschiller expressed that the commission's duties refer to a specific charge. She asked if Representative Terry were assigned to the commission, would he consider the state's current level of funding for education as part of the study. Representative Terry affirmed that if he were a member, he would believe it is vital to cast a wide net to help move New Hampshire forward. He said that SAUs are no exception to the large increase in administrative costs currently felt across the country, and it is the legislature's responsibility to rein in the administrative state.
- Senator Altschiller asked if the charge of the commission should be expanded to include his previous testimony regarding the increasing administrative costs because she feels the bill is limited by a predetermined outcome. Representative Terry disagreed with Senator Altschiller because he did not view the language in the bill as restrictive. He agreed that the legislature could create or contribute to the administrative state.
- Senator Altschiller asked if Representative Terry's school districts have expressed the desire to relinquish the local control that they currently have over their education system. Representative Terry replied that they have not, but mentioned that no one has brought this forward as a possible remedy to his district's challenges. He expressed that this bill is a response to the growing administrative

costs associated with the growing number of SAUs, and he viewed this bill as an opportunity to involve the public in addressing these significant questions.

- Senator Prentiss asked if the study commission would be better suited to produce recommendations instead of a plan. Representative Terry expressed that the bill may not be perfect, but it is good because the study committee is not limited to the language of the bill, citing his personal experience on study committees. He said that if, via the study, the commission found an alternative plan that may be better suited, it would be appropriate to be included in the recommendations.
- Senator Ward referenced lines 29 and 30 and expressed that the word ‘recommendation’ is included. Representative Terry responded that he shared Senator Ward’s interpretation and that a good study committee would produce options.

Representative Timothy Horrigan

- Representative Horrigan stated that this issue was looked at 10 years ago in the House Education Committee, and it did not go far. He mentioned potential problems included issues with cities and interstate school districts.
- He stated that consolidating SAUs could be a good idea if the results produce cost savings, and that he is inclined to support the bill.
- He expressed that local control arguments are used until the local community does something we disapprove of.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition:

Representative Peggy Balboni

- Representative Balboni testified in opposition to House Bill 292.
- She expressed concern that the bill prescribes the outcome of the commission prior to the commission’s work being completed.
- She expressed concern that the one county model outlined in the bill undermines local control and that the commission’s prescribed membership does not reflect the diverse range of education professionals in New Hampshire.
- She stated that many smaller communities are currently seeking to withdraw from their SAU to gain more control over their children’s education. She cited this as evidence that there is no widespread public demand to consolidate SAUs.