

Senate Finance Committee

Deb Martone 271-4980

HB 2-FN-A-LOCAL, relative to state fees, funds, revenues, and expenditures.

Hearing Date: May 6, 2025

Time Opened: 1:00 p.m.

Time Closed: 11:20 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:

1. Adds new definitions to the endangered species conservation act.
2. Requires the department of environmental services to adopt rules and review procedures such that actions of state agencies do not jeopardize the existence or habitats of species protected under the endangered species conservation act.
3. Establishes an environmental scientist position within the department of environmental services to ensure that state agencies do not jeopardize the existence or habitats of species protected under the endangered species conservation act.
4. Requires that rules established by the executive director of the fish and game department establish an administrative fee that the executive director may collect from payments made to the threatened and endangered species compensatory mitigation fund.
5. Requires the department of environmental services to adopt rules regarding when mitigation payments to the threatened and endangered species compensatory mitigation fund are required.
6. Modifies the definition of “environmental review” as it relates to native plant protection.
7. Requires the department of environmental services to build and maintain a database for providing environmental reviews and cataloging protected species for the purpose of assisting state agencies and departments that require environmental reviews.
8. Requires the department of environmental services to adopt rules to establish a process for requesting a screening and environmental review process.

9. Prevents the commissioner of the department of natural and cultural resources from charging a fee for screening department records for instances of protected species or environmental reviews.

10. Prevents the commissioner of the department of natural and cultural resources from using money collected under the natural heritage bureau fund to conduct environmental reviews.

11. Defines "boathouse" and "structural height" in the context of fill and dredge in wetlands statutes.

12. Prevents the New Hampshire Rivers Council from filing written notice with the department of environmental services for the purpose of investigating excavation or dredging permits.

13. Prevents the department of environmental services from issuing 40-day extension periods on excavation or dredging permit applications.

14. Raising the fees associated with shoreline terrain alteration applications and raising fees annually to coincide with inflation.

15. Establishes fees for applications for terrain alteration and requires the department of environmental services to adopt rules to establish a permit by notification for certain projects with plans encompassing an area less than 150,000 square feet.

16. Establishes structural requirements for existing and new boathouses located over public waters and penalties for violation thereof.

17. Requires school districts to adopt policies governing student cell phone use in schools.

18. Establishes the solid waste facility site evaluation committee, requires major solid waste disposal facilities to be certified by the solid waste facility site evaluation committee, and temporarily suspends the issuance of solid waste permits by the department of environmental services.

19. Defines "eligible student" for the purposes of enrollment in the education freedom account program.

20. Makes significant changes to the NH retirement system, including modifying the maximum retirement benefits for certain public employees, adjusting the dates and percentages related to the calculation of retirement benefit, and adjusting the definition of "earnable compensation."

21. Allows municipalities to authorize gaming facilities to operate continuously for 24 hours per day; and prevents a maximum wager limit for certain games of chance.

22. Establishes a video lottery tax at a rate of 30 percent on video lottery terminals.

23. Provides that the general court may appropriate funds from the opioid abatement trust fund to the department of safety for law enforcement activities related to substance abuse prevention, including overtime costs, for officers in the northern part of the state.

24. Revises certain staffing and office requirements for the board of tax and land appeals.

25. Establishes the division of planning and community development in the department of business and economic affairs.

26. Updates references to the state workforce innovation fund administered by the department of business and economic affairs and the statute authorizing state workforce innovation grants for job training through the department of economic security.

27. Repeals the commission on aging.

28. Provides budget transfer authority to the department of corrections.

29. Extends the prospective repeal certain eligibility criteria for mental health services.

30. Suspends graduate medical eligibility payments for the biennium.

31. Directs the department of health and human services to submit a Medicaid state plan amendment to suspend catastrophic aid payments to hospitals for the biennium.

32. Authorizes the department of health and human services to accept additional federal funds, with fiscal committee approval, for the Medicaid to schools' program if necessary.

33. Suspends the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program for the biennium pending sufficient funding.

34. Permits the department of health and human services to accept gifts for the benefit of the department.

35. Establishes certain unclassified positions within the department of health and human services.

36. Suspends congregate housing services for the biennium.

37. Revises criteria for pharmacists filling name brand and generic drug prescriptions under the Medicaid program.

38. Extends a prior appropriation for the pilot program for young adults with developmental disabilities.

39. Extends the effective date for expanded access to court-appointed counsel for children in dependency proceedings, establishes 3 staff attorney positions in the department of health and human services, and identifies funds appropriated to the department for this purpose.

40. Directs the department of health and human services to file an amendment to the state Medicaid plan regarding prescription drug copayments.

41. Directs the department of health and human services to file no more than one Medicaid rate filing with the CMS in each fiscal year of the biennium.

42. Directs the department of health and human services to file a Medicaid waiver and state plan amendment to institute premiums based on income for individuals participating in the granite advantage health care program.

43. Directs the department of health and human services to file a Medicaid waiver and state plan amendment to institute premiums based on income for households with children participating in the Medicaid program.

44. Directs the department of health and human services to restore income verification for Medicaid redetermination to pre-public health emergency income verification standards.

45. Authorizes an additional appropriation to department of health and human services if such funds are required to prevent a waitlist for child care scholarships.

46. Amends the title of certain positions in the department of information technology.

47. Revises the organizational structure of the bureaus within the department of justice, division of legal counsel.

48. Transfers any excess balances related to administration and enforcement expenses of racing and charitable gaming to an accounting unit in the department of

education for distributing state adequacy grants to public school districts and repeals certain purposes for which money in the education trust fund may be used.

49. Clarifies the means of calculating average daily membership in attendance for the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School.

50. Authorizes the state board of education to modify determinations of education adequacy grant amounts.

51. Changes the process through which counsel for indigent defendants may apply for reimbursement for services necessary to an adequate defense.

52. Makes changes to the wage claim settlement account fund.

53. Updates the composition and confidentiality of records of the workers compensation appeals board.

54. Changes the process for awarding of elevator inspection certificates.

55. Expands the authority of the labor commissioner to impose civil penalties.

56. Authorizes appeals of certain decisions by the labor commissioner.

57. Establishes the wage claim settlement fund.

58. Changes the number of members on the workers' compensation appeals board and makes changes in the proceedings.

59. Implements a fee for unit owners to obtain a certificate of successful inspection of an elevator or accessibility lift.

60. Provides that a civil penalty of greater than \$2,500 for violations of certain unfair labor practices may be levied only if specifically authorized by law and allows the imposition of civil penalties for violations of workers compensation laws and youth labor laws.

61. Allows for a hearing where the commissioner of labor denies reimbursement for payment for second injuries under the workers compensation law.

62. Allows an employer or employer's insurance carrier to petition for a hearing after denial of reimbursement for payment of additional compensation under the workers compensation law.

63. Provides that the funds in accounting unit 1051 shall not lapse until June 30, 2027.

64. Allows the director of the division of motor vehicles to authorize certain actions regarding a fictitious, facsimile or simulated license to drive a motor vehicle.
65. Allows the department of safety to disseminate driver history records to federal entities or their authorized agents in certain circumstances.
66. Designates the hazardous materials incident response coordinator as group II retirement-eligible during full-time service.
67. Clarifies the division of fire standards and training and emergency medical services policy regarding the use of properly equipped vehicles to transport sick or injured individuals; removes a reference to licensing of wheelchair vans and emergency medical dispatchers by the division; and repeals a requirement that the division establish an emergency communications network as such responsibility is handled by other state entities.
68. Lapses funds for continued operation of the Cannon Mountain tramway.
69. Repeals the Benjamin Thompson trust fund.
70. Prevents the lapse of two revolving fund class lines in the operating budget.
71. Repeals revenue sharing with cities and towns under RSA 31-A.
72. Repeals certain wastewater state aid grants.
73. Further specifies information required for well monitoring reports.
74. Eliminates certain fees for the construction of sewerage systems.
75. Repeals the aquatic invasive species decal.
76. Allows the department of environmental services to accept an easement from the abutting property owners of all rights necessary for access, and to store equipment during repair, reconstruction, maintaining, and operation of Pequawket Dam, Horn Pond Dam, and Souhegan Site #35 for the consideration of \$1.
77. Expands the type of educational degree a person may have to serve as a division director for the department of environmental services.
78. Varies the types of experience in public health members of the air resources council may have.
79. Reconfigures some criteria to serve on the waste management council.
80. Reconfigures some criteria to serve on the wetlands council.
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81. Increases dam registration fees and sewage disposal fees.
82. Allows all such moneys in excess of \$100,000 made available, after designation by the governor and council, to be expended by the proper persons or agencies in the state government only with the prior approval of the joint legislative fiscal committee.
83. In certain circumstances, allows every department as defined in RSA 9:1 to transfer funds within and among all accounting units within said department, with the approval of the commissioner of the department of administrative service.
84. Allows the governor to accept public funds, gifts, grants, donations or any other source of funds, for the care, maintenance, repair of, and additions to, the bridges house.
85. Provides for the continual and non-lapsing surplus distribution section administrative assessments fund.
86. Allows state agencies to use funds in appropriate budget classes to pay any penalties, fines, interest or other costs imposed on the state of New Hampshire by the NH retirement system or by the IRS after exhausting any relevant appeal process.
87. Increases the maximum ticket price for lottery drawings.
88. Delineates the criteria for distribution and transfers of certain tax revenues and other fund proceeds.
89. Transfers authority for the appointment of certain inspectors from the office of professional licensure and certification to the department of safety.
90. Makes various changes regarding the regulation of barbering, cosmetology, esthetics, and related shops and schools.
91. Increases fees for assorted pesticide product applications, registrations, licenses, and permits.
92. Increases fees for assorted agricultural-services product applications, registrations, licenses, and permits.
93. Increasing fees relative to certain agricultural product permits, goods, and licenses.
94. Changes the weights and measures device license fees and requires certain registered service agencies to pay a \$250 registration fee.
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95. Creates the "Love NH Lakes" number plate and directs that the residual amount of the special fee for the plate and royalties and proceeds from the commercial use of its design be deposited in the cyanobacteria mitigation loan and grant fund.

96. Increases the import fee for automotive oil.

97. Raises fees for the hazardous waste generator self-certification program.

98. Increases fees for certain hazardous waste generators.

99. Creates a solid waste disposal surcharge at landfills, incinerators, and waste-to-energy facilities and creates civil penalties for violations of solid waste management fund statutes.

100. Increases the fee for the application for initial or renewal of a hazardous waste coordinators certification.

101. Requires the department to modify rules to avoid significant harms to human health and the environment, and changes the enabling statute of the department of environmental services solid waste division to require the department to consider health and the environment when making future rules.

102. Increases the boat decal fee.

103. Raises the per diem rate for the public employee labor relations board.

104. Eliminates mandatory surcharges for civil case filings and allows the supreme court to establish rules regarding equitable fee schedules for imposed fines and service charges on credit card payments.

105. Makes changes to the minimum electric renewable portfolio standards.

106. Revises the state energy policy to promote affordable, reliable, diverse, and secure energy resources for the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens.

107. Adds a requirement that until the Sununu Youth Services Center is relinquished, the department of administrative services shall request an appropriation, subject to the approval from the fiscal committee and the governor and executive council, funds necessary to maintain the property.

108. Allows general funds to be used to support activities and infrastructure at a facility that replaces the Sununu Youth Services Center.

109. Requires that any attorney's fee approved for a claim that is to be paid according to a periodic payment schedule also be paid according to that periodic payment schedule.

110. Makes appropriations to the youth development center settlement fund. Sets aside \$10 million pursuant to the state's settlement agreement with plaintiff Michael Gilpatrick in Michael Gilpatrick v. N.H. D.H.H.S, et al.

111. Repeals the division of the arts in the department of natural and cultural resources.

112. Establishes limitations on the percentages of grant-in-aid funds administered by the department of natural and cultural resources, division of parks and recreation, bureau of trails, and the rivers council for the development and maintenance of OHRV (off-highway recreational vehicle) trails on private, municipal, state, or federal lands.

113. Includes operations and initiatives of the Hampton Beach commission as permissible expenses to be paid from the Hampton Beach master plan fund.

114. Suspends the portion of meals and rooms tax revenue credited to the department of business and economic affairs, division of travel and tourism for the biennium ending June 30, 2027.

115. Requires the department of transportation to sell or lease certain rest areas and welcome centers to private entities by July 1, 2026.

116. Authorizes the state treasurer to appoint assistant state treasurers.

117. Suspends deposits into the meals and rooms municipal revenue fund for the biennium ending June 30, 2027.

118. Transfers any uncommitted moneys from the governor's scholarship fund to the general fund.

119. Eliminates the office of the child advocate.

120. Establishes a group III, defined contribution state retirement plan for new state employee members of the retirement system, who begin service on or after January 1, 2026. All new employees of state employers on and after January 1, 2026 will be required to join the group III defined contribution plan as administered by the retirement system, and any other group I employees may join.

121. Eliminates the enforcement division of the liquor commission.

122. Repeals the repeal of certain provisions related to the right-to-know ombudsman and administratively attaches the ombudsman to the office of state and public sector labor relations.

123. Allows any magistrate appointed before January 31, 2025, to continue to exercise the duties of a magistrate until the end of their term of employment, but no later than January 1, 2030, provided that such magistrate shall not conduct bail hearings or make bail determinations.

124. Consolidates the business and commercial dispute docket and the land use review docket of the superior court into one commercial court docket.

125. Abolishes the human rights commission and reassigns cases formerly under their jurisdiction to the superior court.

126. Abolishes the board of land and tax appeals and assigns cases formerly under their jurisdiction to the commercial court docket.

127. Abolishes the housing appeals board.

128. Repeals the requirement that the state engage in certain outreach and marketing activities to increase awareness of the Granite State paid family leave plan.

129. Creates the office of state and public sector labor relations.

130. This bill adds the expiration of the term of the lease or tenancy if over 6 months as grounds for an eviction.

131. Allows alternative treatment centers to operate for-profit.

132. Creates the "partners in housing" program, an initiative under the housing champions fund to assist municipalities, counties, and developers in building modestly priced housing on municipally or county-owned land that is suitable for development.

133. Abolishes the repayment requirement and recoupment procedures for indigent criminal defendants who are appointed counsel.

134. Changes the calculation of costs of an opportunity for an adequate education, extraordinary need grants, and determination of education grants.

135. Establishes fiscal capacity disparity aid grants.

136. Requires schools to use the state's assessment portal when implementing the competency assessment of United States government and civics.

137. Lapses funding appropriated to computer science professional development.

138. Amends various motor vehicle fees.

139. Increases the vanity plate service and renewal fees to \$60.
140. Require nonresident drivers who establish residency in New Hampshire to notify the department of safety if they then cease to become residents within 60 days, or if their out of state driver's license expires or is relinquished.
141. Specifies when the division of motor vehicles shall send violation notices.
142. Removes the requirement for physical safety inspections and on-board diagnostic tests for passenger vehicles and eliminates funding for the motor vehicle air pollution abatement fund.
143. Requiring public-private transportation partnership agreements utilizing state or federal funds to be approved in the 10-year transportation plan and directing that state revenue and proceeds obtained from any partnership be credited to the department of transportation.
144. Allows the fish and game department to conduct raffles, increases the fisheries habitat fee, and directs certain moneys into the fish and game fund.
145. Clarifies group II membership for certain positions with the division of fire safety.
146. Repeals the local option allowing cities and towns to vote to allow the operation of keno games in their communities.
147. Establishes a tax cap for local school districts.
148. Removes the requirement to get approval from the fiscal committee of the general court for public school infrastructure grants.
149. Allows the state board of education to use office of legislative budget assistant audits to satisfy statutory audit and reporting requirements.
150. Removes the requirement that catastrophic special education funds be prorated among the school districts entitled to such aid and requires that disbursements for special education to a school district shall be at least 80 percent of the district's entitlement in the fiscal year.
151. Amends the appropriation regarding special education aid.
152. Makes changes to the New Hampshire excellence in higher education endowment trust fund.
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153. Directs the department of health and human services not to enroll any new participants into the state loan repayment program or the biennium ending June 30, 2027.

154. Requires the department of health and human services to include references to the patients' bill of rights in contracts and contract addenda.

155. Increases the cap on county reimbursement for nursing home services for fiscal years 2026 and 2027; and makes additional payments to counties as reimbursement for overpayment of certain nursing home costs in fiscal years 2020 and 2021.

156. Excludes coverage for circumcision under the state Medicaid plan unless the child has a specific diagnosis for which the procedure is determined to be medically necessary.

157. This bill repeals reimbursement of funds for the foster grandparent program.

158. Repeals the disbursement from the liquor commission to the alcohol abuse prevention and training fund.

159. Requires the department of health and human services to accelerate the implementation of home dialysis.

160. Removes the reallocation of unused funds education freedom account funds to help fund other education freedom accounts.

161. Provides a terms for how previously retired public employees may reenter state service.

162. Exempts ambulatory surgical centers, emergency medical care centers, birthing centers, drop-in or walk-in care centers, dialysis centers, and special health care services from the notice and consent requirements for establishment within 15 miles of a critical access hospital.

163. Defines harm reduction and drug misuse for purposes of alcohol and drug misuse treatment and prevention and establishes a substance use disorder access point program.

164. Requires the commissioner of the department of health and human services to submit a report to the general court that contains a clinical and financial research study concerning adult dental benefits.

165. Modifies the definition of "interchangeable biological product" and allows for interchangeable biological products to be provided by pharmacists subject to certain restrictions.

166. Transfers funds from the opioid abatement trust fund to the alcohol abuse prevention and training fund.

167. Requires the governor's commission on alcohol and drug abuse prevention, treatment, and recovery to specify and itemize funds spent on prevention, treatment and reduction of societal and individual harm, recovery, and program monitoring and evaluation services and programs.

168. Repeals the prohibition on the use of general funds for the granite advantage program and removes the provision requiring the liquor commission to make up for any short fall in the program.

169. Directs the department of health and human services to rename the office of health equity as the office of health access and directs the office to comply with the hiring freeze in Executive Order 2025-02 for the biennium ending June 30, 2027.

170. Provides for the termination of the Medicaid to schools program under certain circumstances.

171. Extends a prior appropriation to the department of health and human services for administration of a substance use disorder recovery initiative by Granite United Way.

172. Mandates that the department of health and human services seek all available Title IV-E, Administration for Children and Families funds to maximize benefits for children in its care.

173. Directs the department of health and human services to serve every person with equal dignity and respect and to not contract with or pay vendors who fail to serve every person with equal dignity and respect.

174. Redefines public payor for purposes of the prescription drug affordability board, adds an alternate member to the board from the board's advisory council; revises competitive bidding procedures, authorizes staffing subject to available funding, and extends a prior appropriation of up to \$20,000 to the board.

175. Allows parents to send their children to public schools outside of their resident district.

176. Directs the department of health and human services to terminate all contracts, grants, or other agreements funded with opioid abatement funds with

effective dates on or after May 1, 2025, for the purposes of funding provisions contained in this act.

177. Allows the department of health and human services' chief medical officer to place standing orders for certain Medicaid covered over-the-counter (non-legend) medications, medical supplies, and laboratory tests.

178. Directs the department of health and human services to use TANF funds to cover any shortfall in funding for employment-related child care services in order to prevent a waitlist.

179. Directs the department of health and human services to seek to implement an outpatient procedure incentive program under Medicaid managed care, to encourage Medicaid beneficiaries to choose to receive outpatient procedures, including ambulatory surgical care, from the lower cost provider when clinically appropriate.

180. Requires the sale of the Tirrell House property in Manchester, New Hampshire.

181. Requires the sale of the Anna Philbrook Center in Concord, NH.

182. Requires the subdivision and sale of portions of the Hampstead Hospital property in Hampstead, New Hampshire, excluding those portions used as the replacement facility for the Sununu Youth Services Center and Hampstead Hospital and Residential Treatment Facility, and those used for any state operations.

183. Directs the department of health and human services to reduce Medicaid provider rates and to use the resulting savings to reduce department appropriations by a specified amount in each year of the biennium.

184. Delays the June 2027 capitation payments to Medicaid managed care organizations until fiscal year 2028 and directs the department of health and human services to use the resulting savings to reduce department appropriations by a specified amount for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2027.

185. Directs the department of administrative services to assess, with certain exceptions, an administrative charge on dedicated funds and accounts for the biennium ending June 30, 2027.

186. Establishes a recreational and socialization services special fund to support recreational services for individuals with developmental disabilities, sets the payment limit for such services at \$595 per individual, and extends the lapse of a prior appropriation to the department of health and human services for this purpose.

187. Makes the administrator of the recreational and socialization services fund and persons or entities with historic horse racing operations licenses charitable organizations.

188. Prohibits all public entities from implementing, promoting, or otherwise engaging in any diversity, equity, and inclusion DEI-related initiatives, programs, training, or policies; requires each agency to report such contracts to the department of administrative services, which shall compile a consolidated report for submission to the governor, speaker of the house of representatives, and senate president; and provides for the amendment (i.e., removing DEI-related provisions) of non-compliant contracts.

189. Prohibits all public schools from implementing, promoting, or otherwise engaging in any DEI-related initiatives, programs, training, or policies and provides processes for the review and termination or amendment of non-compliant contracts and provides for funding halts in the event of a violation.

Sponsors:

Rep. Weyler

Rep. D. McGuire

Rep. Erf

Rep. Edwards

Who supports the bill: Please contact the Senate Finance Committee Legislative Aide (Debra.Martone@gc.nh.gov) for a complete sign-in list.

Who opposes the bill: Please contact the Senate Finance Committee Legislative Aide (Debra.Martone@gc.nh.gov) for a complete sign-in list.

Who is neutral on the bill: Please contact the Senate Finance Committee Legislative Aide (Debra.Martone@gc.nh.gov) for a complete sign-in list.

Summary of testimony presented:

Nancy Rollins, former DHHS Associate Commissioner, Long-Term Care and Community Based Services:

- Supports the restoration of the New Hampshire Office of the Child Advocate to the state budget.
- The New Hampshire Oversight Commission on Children's Services supports an effective, comprehensive and coordinated system of programs and services for children, youth and families and also provides oversight for the Office of the Child Advocate.
- The Office of the Child Advocate is an independent, impartial, public official with authority and responsibility to receive, investigate or informally address complaints about government actions and when appropriate, make recommendations and publish reports.

- The Legislature had the foresight to understand the necessity of an independent impartial entity to review child protection practices and systemic responses to child abuse and neglect.
- This office's work is not redundant and could not, nor should it be, conducted within the scope of DHHS.
- New Hampshire must retain the Office of the Child Advocate to ensure continued oversight of the child protection system and support for New Hampshire's children's best interests.

Robert Dumond, NH Department of Corrections:

- Mr. Dumond is a licensed mental health counselor and member of the Corrections Advisory Board. He opposes the budget cuts made in HB 1, citing serious risks to public safety and inmate care.
- He explained that jails and prisons now house more individuals with mental illness than psychiatric facilities, thus making correctional mental health services critical.
- He warned that eliminating key personnel and services will violate court orders, reduce oversight, and endanger both inmates and staff.
- He noted New Hampshire's success in reducing recidivism through evidence-based programs and urged the Committee to maintain funding to ensure correctional and community safety.

Mary McLaughlin, Interim Director, New Hampshire State Council on the Arts:

- Amend the House budget to reinstate the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts as a state agency and restore funding in the 2026 2027 biennium budget.
- The Council was established to preserve and protect the rich cultural heritage of our state. It is committed to ensuring that every New Hampshire citizen enjoys the cultural, civic, economic and educational benefits of the arts.
- The Arts Council has provided grant support to artists as small businesses, arts and cultural institutions, and communities throughout New Hampshire.
- The arts are a revenue generator for the state providing a positive 5:1 ratio return on investment.
- The Arts Council has built a strong working relationship with veteran services and youth at risk.
- The smaller institutions and projects in New Hampshire's rural and underserved communities will be impacted the most without the capacity to make up the funding elsewhere.
- Artisan residence projects granted to public schools are often the only arts education that some of our schools can afford to offer.
- If the New Hampshire State Council for the Arts is eliminated we will be the only state in the nation without a state arts agency.

Andrew Pinard, Arts4NH:

- Mr. Pinard supports continued funding for the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, emphasizing its importance to individual and community wellbeing.
- He argued that art is a vital part of life because it fosters reflection, emotional processing, and connection among people. It builds community, inspires engagement, and contributes to the economy by generating value and activity.

- He highlighted the importance of arts organizations in providing supportive spaces for young people and others facing life challenges.

Sam Bergman, Executive Director, Apple Hill Center for Chamber Music:

- Apple Hill has been one of the Granite State's bedrock arts institutions providing educational and cultural services to hundreds of students every year on their idyllic 100 acre campus in the Monadnock region. Each summer as many as 300 students from around New England, the country, and the world make their way to the campus.
- The Apple Hill Center has been greatly assisted along the way by the vital support of the New Hampshire Council on the Arts.
- In so many parts of our state the tourism economy is critical to everything that we do. The arts are a critical part of that tourism economy.
- There is a reason that every state in the union from Alabama to Wyoming has an arts council and the reason is that it is one of the savviest investments that a state can make.

Jonathan Sterling, Nashua Community Music School:

- Mr. Sterling explained that without arts funding, the current capacity of the Nashua Community Music School will be reduced from 600 students per week to 280.
- Furthermore, all Title I programs in schools supported by the Nashua Community School would be canceled, in addition to all community concerts and student recitals.
- The school would be forced to reduce faculty by 10 people, many of whom are full-time teachers.

Representative Chris Muns, Hampton:

- The budget adopted by the House will be devastating to those families with individuals with developmental disabilities and acquired brain disorders. There are 10 area agencies that provide services to approximately 12,000 individuals.
- For many years Medicaid billing rates did not change. Recently, however, legislators have made some progress in finally addressing the problem by passing Medicaid funding increases of 2% and 3% per year. That has not come close to filling the funding gap caused by years of neglect.
- The House's budget will cut Medicaid reimbursement rates by 3%, making the already difficult task of finding and hiring qualified staff to enable covered individuals to live independently in the community even more challenging. It also means that current staff who are already probably being paid about what someone working at McDonald's is receiving, will have to take a 3% cut in pay on July 1st.
- The House's budget will also be devastating to the 278 families of individuals who are on the waitlist. These individuals are currently receiving services from their public school system. Under New Hampshire law, when they turn 21 the school system literally at midnight is no longer responsible for them and all future funding must come from Medicaid. That is what the waitlist is intended to cover. The budget the House passed does not fully fund the waitlist. This is a significant step backwards.

- These cuts will have a real impact on real people in our community. None of this is necessary. This is a self-inflicted crisis.
- The House chose to give casino operators 70% of the revenues from new slot machines rather than the 55% Governor Ayotte proposed. Returning to the Governor's proposal generates \$73 million in additional revenue, more than enough to restore the 3% across the board Medicaid rate reduction with about \$20 million left over to help fund the waitlist.
- An additional \$32 million in funding for the waitlist can be generated simply by freezing eligibility in the school voucher program at the levels proposed by Governor Ayotte in Fiscal Year 2026. The balance of funding needed to fully fund the waitlist could come from the \$85 million increase in the Rainy Day Fund.

Doug McNutt, Commission on Aging:

- Mr. McNutt stated that he supports continued funding for the Commission on Aging as a retiree and member of the Commission.
- He emphasized that members include nursing home administrators, home care administrators, and others.
- The Commission helped develop and implement a bill to better fund and coordinate services for the elderly in New Hampshire.
- He urged the reversal of the 3% funding cut to Medicaid services for long-term care. He emphasized that the Commission's work will save money in the long run.

Lily Wellington, Executive Director, NH State Commission on Aging:

- In 1925 the average person could expect to live for 59 years. Today, that average lifespan has increased to 79 years. This is a testament to the power of public health, medical innovations, better nutrition and wise public policy. This remarkable extension of life now requires a fundamental shift in how we plan and build our shared futures.
- We must now proactively adapt our systems to support longer lives. At the heart of this endeavor lies the Commission on Aging.
- The Commission has spearheaded two specific projects looking at how we are aging as a state. One project is the multi-sector plan for aging; a 10-year blueprint for how we intend to support aging in New Hampshire. The second is the community transportation needs assessment, which is a statewide initiative looking at where the gaps in transportation services are.
- Aging is a great unifier. Everyone in this room today endeavors to live a long and fruitful life.
- Funding the New Hampshire State Commission on Aging allows this important work to continue, ensuring that the work done today secures a better tomorrow for all.

Cathy Stratton and Dr. Jeffery Fetter, NH Medical Society:

- Ms. Stratton emphasized that Medicaid is a vital part of the infrastructure for delivering mental health care, warning that funding cuts would push patients back into emergency rooms and New Hampshire Hospital.
- Ms. Stratton and Dr. Fetter emphasized that decisions between patients and physicians are made in the exam room.

- They opposed the HB 357 language included in HB 2, as it would shift immunization decisions to the Legislature.

Katie Brisette, Early Learning New Hampshire:

- Early Learning New Hampshire supports early learning programs such as Head Start Child Care Preschool.
- They host twice a month Zoom calls with the childcare community. In each meeting roughly 100 providers share what's been going on in their world. The Number One crisis they face above all else is staffing, recruiting and retaining good teachers at their programs.
- Child care is the "workforce behind the workforce". It enables everyone to go to work and do their jobs every day.
- Please support the \$15 million that is currently in the House budget.

Jackie Cowell, Early Learning New Hampshire:

- Ms. Cowell emphasized the unanimous vote by House Finance Division 3 in favor of continuing grants that would support childcare businesses over and above their regular operations to help with recruitment and hiring efforts.
- Ms. Cowell expressed hope that the Legislature will continue these grants.

Bob Getchell:

- Do not cut out services.
- Mr. Getchell earns money through 5-cent cans and fundraisers to take vacations, which his case manager helps him with.
- Again, do not cut Mr. Getchell's services.

Marcy Doyle, New Hampshire Nurses Association:

- Ms. Doyle is the President of the New Hampshire Nurses Association.
- She is in support of Momnibus 2.0. She shared a personal story about her experience with infertility and postpartum depression. Despite being a nurse, she felt overwhelmed, panicked, and struggled in silence.
- She urged legislators to support Momnibus 2.0 to improve maternal health care, expand peer support programs, and ensure accessible resources across New Hampshire.

Carlene Ferrier, New Hampshire Nurses Association:

- Ms. Ferrier urged the restoration of multiple budget cuts, including the Alcohol Fund, the 3% Medicaid reimbursement cut, community mental health programs, the State Loan Repayment Program, and the Prescription Drug Affordability Board (PDAB).
- She opposes the inclusion of HB 357 and described it as a dangerous bill that would roll back vaccine requirements and remove authority from the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Carrie Duran, Lakes Region Community Services:

- Ms. Duran stated that she is speaking both as the Legislative Liaison for Lakes Region Community Services and as a mother of a 14-year-old with Down Syndrome.
- Her daughter is going into high school, wants to work, pay taxes, save for college and an apartment, and have a family someday.
- She credited early supports and services, family support, and the in-home support waiver from the state for her daughter's development and success.

- She urged the committee to continue these supports and not cut the services that her daughter and others depend on to be successful.

Roger Desrosier, NHAARP:

- Mr. Desrosier spoke in support of family caregivers, describing this as a smart investment for the state. He highlighted that caregivers provide \$1.8 billion in unpaid care annually. One in six New Hampshire workers are caregivers; without support, many must reduce hours or leave their jobs.
- He urged the committee to fund the New Hampshire Family Caregiver Support Program, Service Link, and CFI.
- Mr. Desrosier criticized Medicaid rate cuts, warning that it will harm access to home care, increase reliance on hospitals and nursing homes, and create system-wide bottlenecks.

Mary Ruberge, Manchester:

- Ms. Ruberge urged the committee to increase income limits and eliminate the resource limit for a program that is a lifeline for people on Medicaid with low income.
- She advocated for the New Hampshire Family Caregiving Program, highlighting the need to support caregivers who help loved ones maintain independence and dignity.
- She voiced support for continuing the New Hampshire Commission on Aging, noting that it is a voice for older adults, promoting healthy aging and system improvement.
- She called for funding PDAB, noting its efforts to lower prescription costs.

Corinne Benfield, Stay Work Play NH:

- Ms. Benfield stated that she is the Executive Director of Stay Work Play New Hampshire.
- She opposed proposed cuts to the University System, warning that it signals to young people that higher education is less affordable, resulting in fewer students building their futures in New Hampshire.
- She urged the inclusion of SB 246, which provides expanded Medicaid coverage for maternal mental health and critical wraparound services. She described it as a strategic investment in the state's future workforce.
- She echoed support for the arts, emphasizing that young people want to live in vibrant places. Music, murals, festivals, and public art are magnets for the top talent that New Hampshire needs.

Kimberly Haley:

- Ms. Haley stated that she is a master-licensed alcohol and drug abuse counselor, as well as a certified prevention specialist.
- She urged the Committee to sustain the Alcohol Fund as budgeted by Governor Ayotte. She opposed the plan to use Opioid Abatement funds, explaining that it will fail and only support those addicted to narcotics.
- She emphasized that the Alcohol Fund supports a three-legged stool of treatment, prevention, and recovery, which is essential for comprehensive care.
- She highlighted that one in four kids in New Hampshire grow up with addiction in their family and urged funding to help young people have healthy lives.

Laurie McIntosh, Our Place NH:

- Ms. McIntosh highlighted the housing crisis for individuals with developmental disabilities, noting that most are living with their aging parents.
- She explained that a group of parents came together five years ago and purchased property to start building supportive housing. Despite this being an already difficult project, Medicaid cuts and reduced access to room and board funding would make it almost impossible for this to be fiscally viable.
- She urged the committee to keep Medicaid funding, emphasizing that these adults can be functional people doing great things in the community when provided with supportive housing.

Nancy Lord:

- Ms. Lord is a single parent of an autistic boy. Her son is on the low end of the spectrum of autism. He depends on services to help him with his daily living situation.
- Ms. Lord utilizes two home care providers through an area agency and depends on these services as she cannot take care of her son by herself.
- In all likelihood her son will never work. He will always need to have someone take care of him 24/7.

Brian Ryll, Professional Firefighters of New Hampshire:

- Mr. Ryll is President of the Professional Firefighters of New Hampshire.
- He strongly supports the Group II retirement provisions included in HB 2, which aim to address sweeping changes from the 2011 retirement reforms that altered promised benefits.
- He cited the New Hampshire Retirement System's positive budget trends, noting that the proposal would not increase the unfunded liability or raise contribution rates.
- Mr. Ryll encouraged the reinstatement of earned benefits as a strategy to retain senior leadership, attract future leaders, and uphold New Hampshire's public safety status.

Tiffany Gladu, Granite State Independent Living:

- Say no to cutting Medicaid funding in New Hampshire. Many individuals Ms. Gladu serves don't just need a little help. They rely on Medicaid-funded care for their very survival. These are not optional supports; they are critical life sustaining services that keep people alive, safe and in their homes.
- Many of their individuals cannot bathe themselves, get dressed, and transfer safely out of bed without assistance. They need help preparing meals, grocery shopping, accessing clean drinking water, and getting their medications. Some cannot reposition themselves in bed, which places them at risk for pressure sores and infections that can become life-threatening. Others require physically invasive bowel programs or catheterization because they cannot urinate or have bowel movements on their own.
- Without the assistance of a caregiver their lives would be at risk. The care provided by these services allows people with disabilities to maintain their well-being and live with dignity and safety in their homes.
- While personal care services are nonmedical in classification they are medically necessary in practice. Without them people are at risk for hospitalization, displacement from their homes, or death.

- These services are already stretched thin. A rate reduction in reimbursement means providers will be paid less for the same medically-necessary work. This does not only impact agencies it directly impacts the people receiving the care.
- Lower rates make it harder to retain and hire qualified caregivers in a field that is already underpaid and undervalued.
- When we can't find staff consumers go without care. They miss showers, they are not repositioned, they develop wounds. They are left alone when they need help getting out of bed, using the bathroom, or eating a meal. They face medical emergencies in their own homes with no one there to help.
- While a rate cut may appear on paper as an administrative adjustment, the reality is it compromises people's ability to get the care they need to live safely at home. It threatens their ability to survive in the community.
- The people providing this care are not doing it for the money. This is not a lucrative field. Caregivers accept the financial burden of their work because they believe that people with disabilities deserve to live full independent lives, with their personal care needs wholly met.
- If we cut funding we're not making a small adjustment. We're cutting into services that keep people alive. Real people will suffer and could die.

Laurie Duff, Easterseals New Hampshire:

- Ms. Duff is the Director of Older Adult Services at Easterseals New Hampshire.
- She urged legislators to not cut Medicaid, emphasizing that 51% of the older adults they serve receive CFI Medicaid services.
- She warned budget cuts would pull the rug out from under vulnerable, older adults.
- She asked the committee to reconsider Medicaid cuts and continue support for the State Commission on Aging.

Alex Koutroubas, Associated General Contractors of New Hampshire:

- The Turnpike System of New Hampshire is a system that comprises about 90 miles of limited access highway, with 36 miles being part of the US Interstate Highway System.
- The last toll increase which funds this system occurred in 2009 for Hampton and 2007 for other select locations. This flat funding model is not sustainable. Critical projects are being deferred, which poses significant public safety, economic development and quality of life concerns.
- The Highway Fund is also under considerable stress. Beginning July 1, \$20 million in revenue earmarked for rural paving and rural bridges will be redirected to cover the Salem to Manchester I-93 debt service. While New Hampshire is reallocating federal funds to cover this gap, this still results in a \$20 million reduction in the construction program, leading to fewer projects, less paving and not as many bridges being repaired. This reduction not only delays much needed infrastructure improvements but also impacts local economies by limiting job opportunities for construction workers and related industries.
- The New Hampshire House did include some very modest DMV motor vehicle increases, many of which haven't been adjusted in 15 or 20 years. They do support those actions.

- The Associated General Contractors do oppose the removal of the state safety vehicle inspections. That action removes almost \$3 million in General Fund and Highway Fund revenue.
- There is a significant proposal in HB 2, Sections 2-8 that involves the reorganization of land development permitting in the state of New Hampshire. It suggests consolidating certain functions in the Departments of Environmental Services, Fish and Game, and Natural and Cultural Resources. This reorganization will create a one-stop shopping process for issuing permits for regulations such as protected wildlife, rare plants, endangered flowers and alteration of terrain permitting. Additionally, the proposal includes a 60-day time limit for DES to review permits.

Megan Brabec, Save the Children Action Network:

- Ms. Brabec described childcare in New Hampshire as unaffordable, with average costs at \$32,000 per year for two children.
- She cited a study showing New Hampshire loses \$500 million annually due to the lack of infant and toddler care, citing that parents with reliable childcare are more productive and miss fewer workdays.
- She urged support for SB 243 to improve the childcare scholarship process.
- She cited that 86% of voters support childcare funding, emphasizing that this is not a request for more, but rather to simply maintain current funding levels.

William Walker, Hollis:

- Mr. Walker has a 26-year old adult son with autism.
- The proposed House budget puts his son's future at risk. It reduces developmental disability by \$91 million, while at the same time appropriates \$91 million for Education Freedom Accounts.
- With Education Freedom Accounts people have an alternative choice of free, public, appropriate education. There is no alternative choice for the developmentally disabled. The choice is homelessness, it's extended hospital stays, and in the worst cases it's death.
- Please bring back Governor Ayotte's proposed recommendations for funding the developmental disability waitlist, and eliminate the 3% rate cut that's been proposed by the House.
- Also include housing stability, and the room and board APN requested by BDS. With that the committee will help secure Mr. Walker's future.

Bob Dunn, Roman Catholic Diocese of Manchester:

- Mr. Dunn stated that he is speaking on behalf of Bishop Peter Libasci and Catholic Charities of New Hampshire.
- He urged the committee to view the budget through the lens of a preeminent priority for the poor, citing human dignity and the common good as foundational principles.
- He emphasized the importance of funding foundational needs such as housing, health care, and food for those in need.
- He asked the Senate to reject the 3% cut to Medicaid providers and reductions to developmental disability services, residential placements for children, and community mental health services.

- He objected to the elimination of the Office of the Child Advocate and cuts to positions within the Department of Corrections.
- He highlighted concerns regarding the nursing home bed moratorium, asking that it be removed based on the Senate Health and Humans Services Committee's unanimous ITL recommendation on House Bill 548.

Laura Vincent:

- Ms. Vincent is very concerned about the funding situation for public schools. With the expansion of Education Freedom Accounts, which are funded through the Education Trust Fund, this will draw money away from the public schools which are funded through the same fund.
- She is also concerned about the recent effort to pass legislation creating tax caps on education funding in each town. It is her understanding this effort has been put aside for now but she fears that it may be resurrected. If so this will limit the amount of funding through local property taxes. While this legislation may reassure taxpayers that they will not be taxed out of their homes, it creates a very scary situation for our schools.
- For most students in public schools funding will become more and more inadequate and educational opportunities will become more limited.
- Ms. Vincent believes that requiring school districts to have cell phone policies is acceptable but should be left to each district to develop their own cell phone policy.
- The state should not mandate tax caps for local towns but leave setting property tax budgets for education to the voters of each district.

Robert Woodward, New Hampshire Prescription Drug Affordability Board:

- Mr. Woodward supplemented prior testimony from AARP in support of PDAB.
- He advocated for the adoption of the Rx discount card in New Hampshire, which has already been proposed by Governor Ayotte.
- He explained that only 6% enrollment of the 22,000 state employees would cover the cost of the program. With higher enrollment, the program could generate a return of approximately 400% within two years.

Andrew Harmon, New Hampton:

- Mr. Harmon serves on the regional coordinating council for community transportation in his area.
- The money that used to help bring in grants to cover many of the programs that provide transportation in the state has, unfortunately, been left out of the budget in HB 2. It is a volunteer driver program. They have to raise about 50% of the cost to match those grants.
- Mr. Harmon works as an independent contractor part-time with a company out of Canada to provide accessibility testing for people with visual impairments. He is unsure if he would qualify for the proposed work requirement hours.
- Please restore the Medicaid cuts and help restore the transportation money.

Bob Sculley, New Hampshire Motor Transportation Association:

- Mr. Sculley opposes a section of HB 2 increasing truck registration fees and other DMV charges totaling \$60 million in the biennium.
- He emphasized there was no hearing for this in a policy committee.
- He criticized the framing of this increase as fees rather than taxes.

- He urged the committee to remove these fees from the budget.

Representative Laura Telerski, Hillsborough County 11:

- One in seven Granite Staters rely on Medicaid, including people with mental health and substance abuse conditions, pregnant women, children, people with disabilities, working families, and veterans.
- Nearly 90,000 children, or one in four are covered by Medicaid. The program pays for 22% of all births in our state.
- Instead of adding barriers like premiums or cost sharing we should be doing what we can to support these lifeline programs.
- Requiring the lowest income residents to start paying 5% of their income for care forces impossible choices, leading many to forego treatment until they are in crisis, driving up hospital costs, and straining our health care system. Those costs will fall upon all of us.
- In the last biennium we raised Medicaid rates in a way that made a real difference. Providers could increase their wages and retain staff, improving services, and reducing hospital bottlenecks. A 3% rate cut now would erase the progress that has been made. At a minimum we should flat fund Medicaid rates to maintain those gains.
- Medicaid, including Granite Advantage, has proven to keep families healthier and our workforce stronger. It has added thousands of good paying jobs and has helped people manage and prevent serious health conditions.
- Representative Telerski is also concerned about cuts to community mental health services. In our fight to battle substance misuse, these services are the backbone of our system of care, keeping people out of crisis, supporting recovery and helping meet the state's mission of ending Emergency Department boarding for psychiatric patients. Cutting funding undermines all of that.
- The New Hampshire Family Planning Program has played a vital role in keeping our state's rates of unintended pregnancies, teen pregnancies and STDs among the lowest in the nation. In rural areas like the North Country these clinics are often the only source of affordable care for cancer screenings and birth control.
- Please restore funding in the DHHS budget, particularly the programs that exist to protect our most vulnerable, and serve those most in need.
- Let's not move backward. Every Granite Stater deserves timely, affordable care without the risk of financial ruin.

Jim Donchess, Mayor of Nashua:

- Mayor Donchess supports retirement system changes for police officers and firefighters. He urged the committee to follow Governor Ayotte's recommendation of \$27.5 million per year in funding.
- He requested that the budget be changed back to the Governor's proposal to direct 50% of new slot machine revenues to fund these retirement changes.
- He asked the committee to reverse the diversion of \$10.7 million from the Opioid Abatement Trust Fund, warning that it would leave no money to fund grants to cities, towns, and organizations.
- He emphasized that Nashua's use of these funds is typical of what is happening across the state, reaffirming the importance of keeping these resources intact.

Representative David Preece, Hillsborough County 17:

- Representative Preece voiced his opposition of both HB 1 and HB 2.
- Eliminating the Office of the Child Advocate, child care workforce support, the Council on Aging and family planning services, not to mention reducing Medicaid does the opposite of what is intended. The House budget harms New Hampshire communities and their working families.
- We pride ourselves with a strong economic development position. US News and World Report currently ranks the state as Number 12 in its economic category. It considers the state's business environment, labor market, infrastructure, affordable housing, access to higher education, and overall community economic growth. Our economic standing will experience a major downfall if we cut state aid for municipal wastewater and funding for tourism development and the Department of Transportation if we raid the Renewable Energy Fund, eliminate the New Hampshire Council of the Arts, and the targeted block grant programs that provide services for each community through the regional planning commissions.
- The Partners in Housing Program, the only program that deals with the housing crisis is being eliminated. We need a stable workforce
- Consider a better budget--consider the Governor's budget.

Donna Hajjar, Salem:

- Ms. Hajjar is the owner of the Learning Path Childcare Center, speaking on behalf of 25 teachers who benefit from childcare workforce grants.
- She said 100% of the grant dollars go directly towards monthly bonuses for teachers.
- She emphasized teachers are spending on the essentials only, urging legislators to keep the \$15 million in the budget to continue these grants.

Gina Rowland:

- Ms. Rowland is the sister and guardian of a 57-year old woman who has Down Syndrome. Her name is Serena. She is a valuable member of society, worthy of basic human rights and proper medical care.
- We cannot allow the state's progress to be undone by these cruel budget cuts. You are not just cutting Medicaid, you will be attacking the very foundation of human dignity and community. These cuts, the 3% wage reductions, the failure to raise room and board and staff retention are not just numbers. They are direct assaults on the lives of New Hampshire's most vulnerable people. It is a slow and quiet push back towards institutionalization. It is not budgeting. It is abandonment.
- In 2015 the State of New Hampshire had to return \$20 million in unused federal DHHS funds when there was \$73 million in surplus that was placed into the Rainy Day Fund. That money could have kept services running and families together.
- We are trying to balance the budget on the backs of people who cannot fight for themselves. This is not about fiscal responsibility, it's cruelty.
- If you want to root out fraud start with where the real money bleeds. Look at pharmaceutical price gouging, bloated hospital overcharges, and insurance company loopholes. Don't come after the people who rely on you to protect them.

- Don't do the so-called easy fix, the back of the budget cuts you propose, such as the \$46-\$90 million cut from the Department of Health and Human Services, the \$14.7 million to the Department of Justice, and the \$600,000 to the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.
- The human services workforce is the backbone of this state. If you cut that everything else falls apart. You're not just cutting services, you're ripping apart the very fabric of New Hampshire. And that is a road to fascism.
- This is not a plea. It is a demand for accountability, decency and vision.
- We will not let you turn New Hampshire into a place where we turn our backs on the most vulnerable among us.

Bill Blum:

- Mr. Blum is a small business owner and board chair of 603 Equality.
- He opposes amendments to the budget that harm our most vulnerable community members.
- He noted recent suicides in Portsmouth, and urged the committee to recognize the underlying causes tied to community harm.
- Mr. Blum called for vital funding to be put back into the 988 number for crisis support.
- He strongly opposes the elimination of the Office of the Child Advocate.

Julia Nye, Laconia:

- Ms. Nye supports full Medicaid funding, funding for the arts, and full funding of the judiciary system.
- Ms. Nye related her personal story involving being born with a severe hearing deficit at birth. After years of intense speech therapy paid by the special needs program she was able to learn how to speak and articulate. The investment in special needs and services pays off by having contributing members of society.

Christina Warriner, Reproductive Equity Now:

- Ms. Warriner stated she is speaking in support of the family planning program as the New Hampshire State Director for Reproductive Equity Now.
- She shared a personal story about losing her mother to metastatic breast cancer. She emphasized that having access to birth control allows her to plan for a healthy pregnancy.
- She explained that this program provides low or no-cost cancer screenings, birth control, and preventative sexual and reproductive health care. She emphasized that eliminating this program would leave thousands without preventative health care options and force community health centers to do more with less resources.
- She urged the committee to fully fund this program.

Joseph Freeman, Executive Director, Kimi Nichols Center:

- The Kimmy Nichols Center in Plaistow was started by parents in the early 1970s as a resource for children with significant disabilities, who had nothing available to them except placement at Laconia State School. It is a major provider of services for adult individuals with developmental disabilities in the southeastern part of New Hampshire.
- As a registered nurse Mr. Freeman interacts with the health care needs of individuals.

- The search for Medicaid providers is desperate. Any cuts to Medicaid will further diminish that resource.
- Mr. Freeman supports funding for the waitlist for people who are waiting at home for services supported by parents who have given up jobs, who have had to curtail their resources and attention to other family members.
- Specifically, the Center provides housing in 10 staff residences for people who need housing. Currently, only 6 out of their 10 residential programs receive room and board funding for items such as food, rent, utilities, snowplowing, maintenance and lawn maintenance. These are items not covered by Medicaid.
- Currently, less than half of the residential providers receive room and board funding. It is a crisis,
- Mr. Freeman's agency alone has a deficit of over \$400,000 from last fiscal year. They are facing a deficit into the next fiscal year of \$140,000. As a small, nonprofit agency they cannot sustain such a loss. Their Board of Directors has already voted to close programs if room and board funding isn't fully funded for our residential programs.

Lorna Roy:

- Ms. Roy explained that she lives with her husband and son, who requires 24-hour supervision and care. Without funding, they would be unable to keep their son at home. She emphasized this would be devastating for their family.
- She explained these programs give her son a happy life and true value.

Don House, Board President, Belknap House:

- This budget is terrible. It cuts programs and services that working families rely on, while raising costs on those who can least afford it.
- Belknap House is the only homeless shelter in Belknap County dedicated exclusively to families. It provides families safe shelter and empowers them to become self-sufficient and independent by providing them opportunities for education and access to community resources.
- Last year, Belknap House helped 14 families, 6 of whom secured housing.
- The proposed budget provides no new funding for housing. It eliminates the Housing Appeals Board, which helped expedite housing projects.
- Belknap House is dependent on available and affording housing to allow residents to move into their homes and apartments as they obtain the skills they need to be independent.
- Without more and better affordable housing more families will succumb to homelessness. There aren't enough shelters today to service all the families that need help.
- most of the residents at Belknap House are dependent on Medicaid. Taxing Medicaid recipients adds a burden to families already struggling with debt. It forces families to make tough decisions about spending their limited funds on food versus health care versus rent.
- Education funding vouchers are already diverting critical funds from our public schools to private schools and religious schools. The net result is higher property taxes for communities like Belmont. Higher property taxes get passed along as higher rent for families who can't already afford to buy a home. This puts even more of a strain on the housing markets.

- The proposed reduction in funding community mental health centers will impact the services that some of the residents depend upon. Belknap House works with over 50 social service agencies that assist families with various services. Federal and state budget cuts to these programs makes it more challenging for families to receive the services they require.
- Eliminating the Office of the Child Advocate is one example of a cut that adversely impacts families in New Hampshire.
- Belmont is a small community and for the second year it's running a default budget because town voters don't like and can't afford higher property taxes. This budget shifts more educational funding and social services to the town. The net result will be even more higher property taxes just to maintain the current level of services.
- Find other resources to fund programs instead of cutting them.
- The House budget results in more housing insecurity, food insecurity, and wealth inequality that already exists.
- The current budget is a disaster for those who can't afford it. Do better for New Hampshire.

Courtney Tanner, Dartmouth Health:

- Ms. Tanner is the Senior Director of Government Relations at Dartmouth Health.
- Daily, 100 patients cannot leave the hospital due to the lack of community supports and services, such as long-term Medicaid beds or public guardians.
- She raised concerns about HB 2's elimination of the Commission on Aging, the Office of the Child Advocate, and PDAB.
- She opposed the 3% cut to all Medicaid reimbursement and the \$19 million reduction to community mental health centers. She urged the committee to rethink the Alcohol Fund restructure and tobacco control programs.
- She warned of the potential consequences if changes with the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) are made, describing New Hampshire as a trigger state.

Margaret Franclhauser, New Hampshire Commission on Aging:

- New Hampshire and the country are experiencing a very dramatic demographic shift toward an older population. Importantly, New Hampshire today is the second oldest state in the country if you consider the proportion of people aged 65 and older. This is an issue we cannot ignore because this is who New Hampshire is and will continue to be. Not only are we the second oldest but we have one of the oldest counties in the entire country, Carroll County, where nearly one out of every three people is 65 or older.
- When Ms. Franclhauser was born one out of every 12 people was 65 and older. Current data shows that in 5-10 years this will continue. This is a new demographic trend that will continue as fewer children are born and more people are privileged to live to older ages.
- Today's older adults are more diverse, they're better educated and healthier, and more productive than in any generation before us. Those additional years provide an opportunity for this state; they also provide challenges.

- Our housing system, our social services system, and our employment system are all really configured for a very different age mix in this state.
- The New Hampshire Commission on Aging was created to inform the Legislature about important issues related to aging. It's an extremely inexpensive, efficient, and effective commission. It is overwhelmingly staffed by volunteers.
- The Commission encourages you to allow it to continue with its mission so that New Hampshire can be prepared for the population that not only exists today but will continue to exist in the future.

Rich Gulla, State Employees Association:

- Mr. Gulla expressed deep concern with HB 1 and HB 2, urging the committee to support the Governor's proposed budget.
- He opposed the \$35.4 million cut to the Department of Corrections, noting that it will jeopardize safety and increase litigation costs.
- He highlighted cuts made to Public Defenders, the Judicial Branch, Environmental Services, the Department of Justice, Information Technology, the Retirement System, and the Legislative Branch. He emphasized that government must be open and transparent.
- He supports the Group II fix and called for a cost-of-living adjustment for Group I retirees.

Karen Blake, Northern Human Services Family Support Advisory Council:

- Ms. Blake's son is currently eligible for the in-home supports waiver. He is going to graduate from high school with a full diploma, but is now facing an uncertain future. Once he graduates from high school he will no longer be eligible for the adult developmental disability waiver. Young people like my son may once again have to wait for services. The in-home supports waiver only has about 300 spots and it is not an entitlement. There are kids waiting for Ms. Blake's son to come off in-home supports so they, too, can have a chance.
- Ms. Blake's son will go from having a robust life, learning and interacting with his peers as a vibrant member of his community, to likely sitting on her couch most of the time.
- Without support her son's transition from in-home supports to the adult DD waiver is not a surprise. They have been planning for this day since he was 14 years old. This is likely true for all 278 individuals who are slated to come onto the adult DD waiver in the next two years.
- While Ms. Blake talks about the impact to her son, she also has to recognize the financial impact of their family. Ms. Blake is a widow now solely responsible for keeping a roof over their heads and food on the table. She is forced to take time away from her higher paying job to support her son. Not only is this putting his future in jeopardy, it is also putting her financial future in jeopardy.

Frank Campo, NH Troopers Association:

- Mr. Campo spoke in support of the retirement provisions for the middle tier in HB 1. He argued against the idea that passage would cause a mass exodus of public safety personnel.
- He noted that prior to 2012, officers routinely kept 20-25 year careers, but recent changes have led to early departures.

- He explained that the legislation includes a phase-in over 10 years.
- He emphasized that this provision would serve as a retention tool, which is desperately needed in communities struggling to keep first responders.

Elven Ealy:

- We need to fund the arts.
- Definitely no Medicaid cuts.
- We should fund our seniors, our public schools, and the Alcohol Fund.
- We have to have priorities, and prioritize those needs over wants.
- Budgets are moral documents; they show you what you value.
- We need to take care of the least of us first.
- Nobody should be getting a tax break until we take care of those in need

Representative Wendy Thomas, Hillsborough County 12:

- Representative Thomas is opposed to taking \$10 million from the Renewable Energy Fund, noting that it takes away from New Hampshire's renewable energy future.
- She argued these funds support renewable energy projects that bring good jobs to our economy and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
- She is opposed to the HB 219 language included in HB 2, and criticized the elimination of new solar from the Renewable Portfolio Standard.
- She warned this change would undercut financial incentives, threaten jobs, undermine climate goals, and leave the state lagging behind.

Steve Boczenowski:

- Fifteen years ago Mr. Boczenowski lost his 21-year-old son, Jeffrey, to suicide . He has gotten involved in the suicide prevention community, and currently serves on the New Hampshire Suicide Prevention Council.
- Mental health providers and public health officials are so dedicated and passionate about their work.
- A couple of years ago the Granite State implemented a new program, the 988 Suicide Prevention and Crisis Lifeline. Not only does 988 direct the proper resources to people who are suicidal or in mental health or substance misuse crisis, but it also frees up police officers to do the work for which they are trained.
- The 988 Lifeline needs to be funded properly and SB 255 does just that. It is critically important the language from SB 255 be included in the budget.
- Adequate funding for 988 will help to decrease the number of tragic suicides in our state. Please make that a reality.

Representative Mary Hakken-Phillips, Grafton County 12:

- Representative Hakken-Phillips is opposed to HB 1 and HB 2, specifically a policy in HB 2 introducing a DEI ban added without public hearing or fiscal analysis.
- She warned the ban lacks a clear definition and risks excluding certain classes of people from public life and learning. She raised concerns about the impact on students with learning disabilities, disabled individuals, low-income residents, veterans, and religious communities.
- She noted this policy creates legal exposure, risking litigation for breach of contract, discrimination, and non-compliance with federal law.

Devan Quinn, NH Womens Foundation:

- Arguably everything in the budget impacts women and girls in New Hampshire.
- In New Hampshire, women are more likely than men to be enrolled in Medicaid. In terms of mental health, women are more likely than men to experience anxiety and depression. Women are also more likely to seek and get help and treatment for mental health as long as providers and health care is available to them. Cuts to Medicaid threaten women and girls' ability to seek that care.
- The family planning program supports reproductive and sexual health services like STI screenings, birth control, and cancer screenings. It's been working in New Hampshire and is worthy of our investment.
- We have the opportunity to invest in maternal health in the budget through Momnibus 2.0. We know that 11 maternity wards have closed in the last two decades in New Hampshire. The leading cause of maternal mortality is actually behavioral health and substance use, which is different than other states.

Brendan Williams, New Hampshire Health Care Association:

- Mr. Williams is the President and CEO of the New Hampshire Health Care Association.
- He urged the Senate to preserve funding for nursing homes as proposed by the Governor and to reject the 3% Medicaid cuts affecting nursing homes and related service providers.
- He requested a 2% annual funding increase for Cedarcrest Center for Children with Disabilities to support wages and medical equipment costs.
- He expressed support for SB 131, proposing provisional payments to nursing homes during the Medicaid application process and requesting funds for a revolving fund for this purpose.
- Mr. Williams noted there is a \$4.5 million unreimbursed care debt in districts of the members of the Senate Finance Committee, with some facilities being owed as much as \$900,000.
- He proposed an increase in fees to assist the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) with Medicaid application processing.

Kathleen Bigford, NH School Funding Fairness Project:

- How will passing a state budget that decreases funding for public schools, increases local property taxes, and includes policies that harm students and communities help parents?
- Ms. Bigford has watched as opposition to harmful education policy has been voiced by thousands of Granite Staters loudly and clearly, and is still being ignored today.
- Ms. Bigford delivered a public petition signed by herself along with 1,930 other Granite Staters on behalf of New Hampshire School Funding Fairness Project. Over 195 New Hampshire towns are represented, 95% of students, and every Senate district. This means every single legislator in this room has a constituent who signed this petition asking you to invest in public education.
- The programs outlined in this budget lack financial and academic accountability. They do nothing to address very real concerns.
- Granite Staters are screaming at the top of their lungs pleading for action, only to be dismissed.

- The voices represented in this petition demonstrate there is not a single legislator in New Hampshire who isn't ignoring a constituent by continuing down this path.
- How will this budget help New Hampshire students and taxpayers?

Tom Stonitsch, Public Defender, Manchester:

- Mr. Stonitsch urged the Committee to fully fund the New Hampshire Public Defenders Program (NHPD) at the prioritized needs budget of \$37 million.
- He emphasized NHPD is cost-effective, provides essential public defense services efficiently, and is far less expensive than outsourcing to private attorneys.
- He warned that funding NHPD at \$28.8 million could lead to a 22% reduction in cases, potentially costing the state an additional \$15.6 million for private lawyers.
- He stated that \$32.6 million in funding would not allow NHPD to hire new lawyers, undermining its efficiency and forcing cuts to services, potentially adding \$10 million in private lawyer costs.
- He emphasized that without full funding, New Hampshire could face a costly and inadequate public defense system.

Holly Stevens:

- Ms. Stevens was in attendance at a legislative event held at the Philbrook Building that was also attended by the folks who live there. A woman asked her if she was a Senator. Ms. Stevens told her she was not a Senator. The woman then said to Ms. Stevens, "Can you please tell them not to sell my home?"
- Ms. Stevens is passing along the message, which is a request that the provision regarding the sale of the Philbrook Building in the budget proposal be removed.

Virginia Nossif, Conway:

- Ms. Nossif shared a personal story about her son's mental health crisis.
- She urged the committee to increase funding for New Hampshire's mental health system.
- She emphasized limited inpatient capacity, low wages for community mental health staff, and the lack of transitional housing create ongoing barriers and crisis cycles.
- She urged the Legislature to continue investing in mental health infrastructure to ensure timely, respectful, and effective care.

Barbara Brunelle, NAMI New Hampshire:

- Along with her husband, Mrs. Brunelle is the legal guardian for an adult family member who was diagnosed with a severe, persistent mental illness. He lives with them at home.
- For that family member Medicaid is not just a program, it is a lifeline.
- Thanks to Medicaid her loved one has access to critical services such as medical care, mental health counseling, vocational rehab, prescription medication, dental care, transportation to and from his medical appointments, SNAP benefits, and inpatient and outpatient hospital programs.
- When he is in crisis these services have been lifesaving. They've helped guide him on a path toward healing, supported by hardworking, dedicated clinicians,

therapists and social workers. He is steadily reclaiming his strength and working toward a future filled with hope and purpose.

- Their family, like so many others across the state, depends on these supports.
- In New Hampshire roughly 183,000 people rely on Medicaid. That's about one in seven residents.
- This is not just their story. It's the reality for thousands of your constituents. If Medicaid in this state is cut the consequences will be devastating to thousands, including their loved ones. They could lose access to essential medications and psychiatric care. They could wait weeks for a hospital bed in times of crisis. They would face greater risk of stigma, decompensation, homelessness, incarceration or even death.
- This is also not just a mental health issue. It's an economic issue with far reaching implications. Cuts to Medicaid would lead to the loss of thousands of jobs across hospitals, clinics, treatment centers, pharmacies, and assisted living facilities. They would force some health care providers to shut their doors limiting access to care for everyone, including those with insurance. It would have a ripple effect across other industries as well such as retail, construction and manufacturing, as families and workers struggle to stay afloat. It would ultimately result in long-term damage to our state's economy, and public health damage far greater than any short-term budget savings.
- Mrs. Brunelle's loved one and thousands like him are heroes. They face daily struggles most of us can't begin to imagine and still they hold on to hope, contribute to society, and work toward healing.
- Even heroes need support. Please don't take that away. Don't let funding cuts be their kryptonite. Medicaid isn't just a budget line. It's a lifeline. It keeps families alive, people alive, and communities stable.

Timothy Weeks:

- Mr. Weeks shared a personal story about his experience with mental health challenges and emphasized how Medicaid-funded services helped him recover.
- Through Monadnock Family Services, Medicaid provided him with access to a psychiatrist, case manager, therapist, peer specialist, and employment support at no cost.
- He credited Medicaid as the key enabler of his recovery and independence. He urged the committee to oppose the proposed Medicaid changes, warning that future patients might lose access to life-saving care.

Amy Wheeler Teas:

- Ms. Teas a mother of two children with developmental disabilities and she echoes all of the messaging spoken from the developmental disabilities community.
- In 1991 when Laconia, the state institution closed a promise was made to families to disperse funds locally so that families could care for their loved one and they could be a member of their home community.
- If we start cutting and reducing programming that goes towards that effort we're breaching that promise.

- What if your beloved son or daughter was born with a rare genetic syndrome like autism or cerebral palsy. How would you feel if you knew they were at risk of not getting the supports they need to live a full life?
- Dig deep into your conscience and vote to fully fund programs such as Medicaid and the waitlist.

Karen Liot Hill, Executive Councilor, District 2:

- Councilor Liot Hill urged the Legislature to avoid shifting financial burdens onto local property taxpayers. She cited the state’s past reduction in retirement contributions for public employees, which led to increased local taxes.
- She emphasized underfunding of rooms and meals revenue, special education, and public schools consistently drive up local property taxes.
- She explained that universal school vouchers further strain local budgets, describing them as handouts to wealthy, private schools.
- She opposed adding Medicaid premiums for low-income residents, explaining it unfairly shifts state costs to those least able to pay.
- She called for a budget that fulfills New Hampshire’s constitutional obligation to fund public education and prevent cost-shifting to municipalities.

Brianna Hankel, Maternal Health Coalition:

- There is currently a maternal mortality crisis across the United States. The New Hampshire Senate has an opportunity to address this issue by including SB 246 in the budget, also known as the Momnibus 2.0 bill.

Heather Martin, NH Mom Hub, Hope on Haven Hill:

- Ms. Martin shared a personal story about the loss of her sister to postpartum psychosis. She emphasized the urgent need for better maternal mental health support in New Hampshire.
- She voiced strong support for Momnibus 2.0 and stressed the need to build a ‘peer support army’ for moms who need connection and community.
- She emphasized that maternal mental health is a foundational public health priority.

Alison Palmer, Hope on Haven Hill:

- Ms. Palmer testified on behalf of every nurse in New Hampshire working on the front lines of maternal and infant care.
- She is also a member of the Maternal Mortality Review Committee, which reviews cases of maternal deaths. It is an arduous task and something they do so that they can learn to do better.
- The New Hampshire Mom Hub, funded just 5 months ago with a modest state investment, has created an infrastructure to coordinate care with WIC home visitors, mental health providers, and state agencies making it easier for pregnant and postpartum individuals to get the help they need before a crisis.
- Every year in New Hampshire the state welcomes approximately 12,000 new babies and yet 20% of mothers, about 2,400 each year experience perinatal depression.
- This is not just a health crisis. This is an economic crisis.
- With the potential funding of Momnibus 2.0, the New Hampshire Mom Hub was developed as the initial component to develop the infrastructure needed to

support screening, identification, response and referrals for perinatal mental health, including substance use conditions.

- A perinatal psychiatry access line is the clinical arm of a comprehensive psychiatry access program that links with resource and referral specialists and navigators, training and educating aspects they offer from the New Hampshire Mom Hub. The result is building capacity among our health care providers. Using these strategies with our current workforce allows us to address the needs of childbearing individuals across the continuum of perinatal mental health.
- The more psychiatrically complex cases are reserved for referral to specialized reproductive psychiatric clinicians.

Chief Steve Buxton, Nashua Fire Department:

- The retirement provisions contained in the budget will not impact his retirement. He is here to advocate for the men and women who serve under his command, and for the safety of the community they serve.
- Nashua represents the second largest fire department in our state with 179 members. Of these members, 51 would have their retirement benefits restored under the provisions of HB 2.
- Across New Hampshire this group of individuals includes senior firefighters, lieutenants, captains, deputy chiefs and chiefs representing decades of experience, leadership and sacrifice.
- When we lose one of these senior leaders it leaves a hole far deeper than the job opening. It cost the city approximately \$50,000 to recruit, train, and prepare a replacement. This cost ultimately falls onto the backs of local taxpayers.
- What we truly lose is something money cannot buy: mentorship, judgment, and the wisdom of only years of front line experience that you can gain.
- The New Hampshire Retirement System has always been more than a benefit. It is a promise; a solemn agreement that if you dedicate your career to the service of others your community will stand by you when your shift finally ends.
- It has been our strongest tool in attracting, retaining and honoring the best among us today.
- That promise is at risk. Not approving the restoration provisions would send a devastating measure to not just senior firefighters but all members of the fire service. It would make it harder to recruit the next generation of firefighters. It would push seasoned leaders to leave before their time. And it would ultimately weaken the very fabric of public safety in communities across this state.
- Chief Buxton is hopeful the committee will continue to support Governor Ayotte's retirement promise.

Teresa Moler, Nashua:

- Ms. Moler explained that she is in remission from a serious mental health condition. She credits her stability to comprehensive mental health services.
- During weekend crises when regular services are unavailable, she relies on the 988 crisis line and rapid response teams. These interventions help her avoid expensive and unnecessary emergency room visits.

- She emphasized that underfunding mental health services would result in higher financial and emotional costs for both individuals and the state. She urged the Senate to fully fund mental health services.

Elizabeth Carl:

- Ms. Carl explained that she has firsthand knowledge of the system's impact as a mental health patient of 20 years.
- She is opposed to the proposed budget due to the significant reductions in mental health funding. These cuts will mean fewer available services and diminished access for residents in need.
- She credited these services to saving her life and urged the committee to recognize the need for mental health care and prioritize it in the budget.

Fred Poisson:

- Mr. Poisson is the Executive Director of Connections Peer Support Center in Portsmouth and Northwood, New Hampshire. They operate a residential step up/step down program in Northwood that provides peer-led mental health transitional support for free to adults in the state of New Hampshire.
- Funding for such programs faces being entirely eliminated with the proposed budget cuts.
- Mr. Poisson understands and respects the need for fiscal responsibility. Continuing to fund agencies such as his is a fiscally responsible and necessary decision.
- Mr. Poisson's agency and step-up/step down programs in general assist individuals in getting their lives back on track, regain their autonomy, learn how to self-manage their symptoms, and return to work in a way that is sustainable. The programs play a vital role in employing individuals who may not be employable in other situations.
- Seven of his current staff started either as participants in their program or as members at their center. The majority of his staff have significant mental health presentations and executive functioning challenges and require a work environment that is supportive of these challenges.
- Three of his staff have felt secure enough in their work environment and employment over the past year to begin the pursuit of no longer receiving social security benefits. And three of his staff were able to work themselves out of being unhoused this past year.
- Step up/step down programs play a vital role in reducing the cost to hospitals and emergency rooms as well as the individual who may be seeking support there. They offer an alternative to hospitalization that has been shown to reduce the amount of emergency room stays.
- There has been a mental health provider and services shortage in New Hampshire for almost a decade, most notably affecting marginalized populations receiving Medicaid. The lack of available and cost-effective supportive services results in the individual suffering from a mental health experience often being unable to sustain employment, secure stable housing, and in the end requiring more costly interventions.
- They offer effective advocacy that allows those participating in the program to receive appropriate care and support so that their recovery is sustainable. They

offer aftercare support to further strengthen the chances of a sustainable long-term recovery that will allow individuals to remain employed and continue their pursuits of self-sufficiency.

- So many agencies are at significant risk of losing their funding with these cuts. All provide vital supports and services to adults in the state of New Hampshire that help keep them alive and well and move them towards sustainable recovery. It allows them to work again or remain working which allows them to regain their autonomy and independence.

Julia White, Manchester:

- Ms. White shared a personal story about battling mental health challenges and emphasized that emergency rooms lack the proper resources and training to support patients in a mental health crisis.
- She urged the committee to fully fund community-based mental health services to prevent more people from experiencing trauma like what she experienced in emergency settings.

Sarah MacFadzen, On the Road to Wellness:

- Ms. MacFadzen is a person who has struggled with mental health.
- Please oppose the budget cuts that could deeply affect transitional housing and other community mental health resources available to people like Sarah.
- Ms. MacFadzen began struggling with her mental health during the pandemic. Without access to affordable services her mental health quickly declined. By the summer of 2022 the dizzying cycle of highs and extreme lows, delusions, and paranoia got so out of hand she was unable to hold a job. She was asked to leave her apartment and had already burned every bridge she had. She had nowhere to go.
- Sarah spent several months living in her car and considering suicide as the only way out. Just when she was ready to give up she found the peer support agency, On the Road to Wellness, and gained access to empathy, understanding, support, and resources.
- Remaining unhoused and very unstable, she applied to their residential wellness program, Step Up/Step Down, a 90-day transitional housing and peer support program that basically saved her life.
- With the patience and support of a 24-hour staff, she was able to get a part-time job. Eventually, she moved to full-time work, found an apartment, and found her footing again.
- Today, Ms. MacFadzen is the Residential Director of the very program that gave her a second chance. She is honored to work hard every day to create and maintain a supportive and peaceful environment conducive to healing and growth. Where others who are facing challenges similar to hers can rebuild their lives and recover their own sense of purpose.
- As a program funded entirely by the state it is absolutely essential to continue funding transitional wellness and recovery programs, and continue to offer affordable alternatives to hospitalization and transitional living programs.

Alex Taylor, Manchester:

- Ms. Taylor shared a personal story about her mental health challenges. She has recently experienced faster mental health evaluation and discharge times, highlighting the progress made possible through increased funding.
- She emphasized that timely access to medications and treatment has stabilized her mental health and allowed for personal growth.
- She urged legislators to maintain or increase funding in the budget to ensure timely and compassionate care for those facing mental health crises.

Cheryl Steinberg, New Hampshire Legal Assistance:

- Ms. Steinberg testified on behalf of the Justice and Aging Project.
- She opposes the elimination of the Commission on Aging, and the proposed cuts to Medicaid funding.
- Because the population of aging Granite Staters is only going to grow, and because the Commission on Aging is more important than ever, it would be a huge step backwards if it were eliminated at this juncture.
- Eliminating or reducing Medicaid funding as proposed would also be a huge step backward.
- While there have been some increases, particularly with the Choices for Independence Program, the funding isn't enough. People are still not getting all their needs met with the current level of funding. If we were to cut it again these people would be back to the situation they were 2 years ago. Certain agencies were ready to close their doors because they weren't getting enough funding.
- These CFI participants are at risk of potentially either going into more expensive institutional care or even dying.
- Please support SB 122. It is another cost effective way to help low income, older people with their Medicare costs so they can take advantage of all the care they need, and hopefully keep them out of hospitals and nursing homes.
- Please support the Governor's recommended budget that includes the Commission on Aging, level funding for Medicaid, and SB 122.

Betsey Patten:

- Ms. Patten is Chair of the Assessing Standards Board.
- She emphasized support for maintaining a consistent and cost-effective method for resolving property tax disputes.
- The Board supports an appeal process that is accessible to both taxpayers and municipalities without increasing financial burdens.
- The current process benefits from a high-level of property tax expertise, which contributes to fair and knowledgeable decisions.
- She emphasized property tax is one of New Hampshire's largest revenue sources, and a fair appeals system helps ensure that revenue is managed effectively.

Suzanne Ketteridge:

- Ms. Ketteridge is the interim Executive Director at the Public Defender Program.
- Last year the Public Defenders Program closed over 22,000 cases across the state, with 1,500 of those being juveniles. They've covered mental health courts, veterans courts, and treatment courts. They are unable to keep up with the

cases that continue to flow in from all parts of the state. They have already had to close intake to four courts across the state, Milford, Berlin, Plymouth and Laconia because they simply don't have enough lawyers. Every case public defenders can't take has to go to a private or contract attorney at 2-3 times the cost of a public defender.

- Not only does it clog up the courts, it delays justice to the victims as well.
- Because of the cases that they have and the burnout their young lawyers encounter they lose many of them. They have lost 19 in this fiscal year, 26 in the last, and 22 the prior year.
- How do they replace them? They do what everybody else does--recruit at law schools across the country.
- New Hampshire has the reputation as one of the best public defender programs in the country and that is due to the training and dedication to provide good, legal services. Even though these public defenders make only \$65,000 a year coming out of law school, it is \$10,000 less than any prosecutor in the state. It is also one of the lowest salaries of any public defender in the country.
- Individuals flock to apply to the program. Four weeks ago offers were made to 19 young people graduating from law schools such as Georgetown, Harvard, UNH, and all of the regional schools. It then became somewhat apparent they were not going to get their prioritized needs budget. That forced the program to send letters for the first time in its history to all of those young candidates and tell them they couldn't be hired. The program took a hit to its reputation as the best place to work as a public defender, and the state took a hit as the best place to be assured employment if it relies on state funding.
- If we can't provide lawyers and are forced to close courts then we'll have to drop cases or let people out of jail as we can't give them a lawyer in a timely fashion.

Matt Davis, New Hampshire Department of Corrections:

- Mr. Davis is the Recruitment and Retention Sergeant at the Department of Corrections. His position is among those being cut under the proposed budget.
- He warned that cutting over 100 positions including sworn officers, mental health staff, and support roles would endanger public safety and the effectiveness of the prison system.
- The tasks of these eliminated positions would fall on already overburdened officers who lack the specialized training, thus increasing the risk of errors, burnout, and dangerous conditions.
- He noted New Hampshire's system has been ranked the safest in America for two years, which he attributed to robust programming and staff support.
- He explained recruitment is plummeting due to the media coverage of the proposed cuts.
- He emphasized while these cuts may save money in the short term, they will likely result in costly litigation, increased injuries, loss of life, and institutional control.

Patricia Long:

- Ms. Long is concerned for the fiscal stability of our state.
- Prior to 2021 Education Freedom Account grants were not a budget line item. Since then the cost of EFAs has grown to more than \$30 million.

- The Executive Director of the Children's Scholarship Fund has said the income cap removal could result in doubling the number of EFA grants awarded, with a projected cost of \$60 million by 2027. Add an additional \$6 million for the administrative fee paid to the fund and that balloons into a hefty total of \$66 million. That is merely an estimate of the expansion of the program.
- In 2021 EFAs were to support low-income families; in this budget universal EFAs will only benefit wealthy families who already have the means to send their children to private schools.
- It is clear New Hampshire cannot afford universal EFAs. To offset the expense for universal EFAs you decided to cut \$70 million from the university.
- Ms. Long does not understand how it is fiscally responsible for a family of 4 who has an income of \$200,000 a year to receive a tax-free grant for \$20,000 to offset their private education, while this budget cuts funds for Medicaid, for those with disabilities and defunding our university. Additionally, it is shocking that every service in New Hampshire either is being defunded or the tax burden is trickling down to our local property taxes.
- The only program that receives money in this budget is expansion of the EFAS, totaling \$70 million by 2027.
- Use these monies for services for those in great need rather than for wealthy families who do not need public assistance.

Lieutenant Eric Kinsman, New Hampshire ICAC:

- Lieutenant Kinsman is the current commander for the New Hampshire Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.
- In 2022 the New Hampshire ICAC advocated for an increase to its 2-year grant from the Attorney General's Office to address a continued increase in workload. Prior to 2022 New Hampshire ICAC used to receive an average of 35-50 new case referrals each month. Advances in technology and the social media culture has contributed to the now 180-200 new case referrals they now receive each month. The money they received was immediately used to purchase additional digital forensic equipment and the licenses to operate them. The funds also were used to send task force members to training, provide them with laptop computers used for investigations, and to increase their staffing capabilities.
- They continue to fund their ESD K9 program and provide educational events to students and parents across the state.
- In 2023 and 2024 with the grant funds received from the Attorney General's Office 1,199 investigations, 99 arrests, 65 child victims were identified, 13 child victims were rescued from ongoing sexual abuse, 748 search warrants were obtained, 2,245 forensic exams completed, over 417 terabytes were processed, and 339 officers and prosecutors were able to receive training. They were able to accomplish 168 community outreach presentations to students and parents, totaling over 5,400 attendees, and they had 135 deployments with K9 Echo.
- While the New Hampshire ICAC could certainly benefit from additional funding they are only asking for continued level funding for fiscal years 2026 and 2027.
- If their state grant funding from the Attorney General's Office is ultimately cut in any way it will have an immediate and massive negative impact on its mission. Hundreds of cases will not be able to be investigated, investigators will

lose their jobs, the ESD K9 program will be discontinued, and most importantly, child victims will not be able to be located, identified, and receive the important help and services they so desperately need.

Marianne Barter, Merrimack County Daycare:

- Ms. Barter explained that childcare programs across the state are struggling to recruit and retain qualified staff. Wages for early childhood educators have remained among the lowest in the economy.
- She emphasized this is important yet underfunded work, urging the \$15 million for recruitment and retention grants be retained.
- Ms. Barter explained this is the workforce behind the workforce, so when they can work, others can too.

Henry Och, Harbor Care, Nashua:

- Mr. Och is the CEO of Harbor Care of Nashua. It is an agency working to break the cycle of homelessness through housing supports, health care for the homeless, and many programs for homeless veterans.
- About 49% of their patients are part of the Medicaid program. They provide many services including addiction treatment.
- Mr. Och related a story about a patient he called John, who had been helped by many providers across the state, but unfortunately, not a lot of progress was made. John was finally referred to Harbor Care where they provided transitional housing, and connected him to a federally qualified, community mental health center. The Medicaid program they connected him with provided primary care, and Harbor Care assisted with his mental health needs. John was with Harbor Care for approximately 18 months. Ultimately, he moved to permanent housing. What is remarkable about this story is that in the preceding years before working with John and getting him connected to the Medicaid program, he was in the hospital over 100 times. Once becoming involved with Harbor Care he was not in the hospital at all for any reason.
- That demonstrates the value the Medicaid program introduces into the health care system.

Laura Milliken, New Hampshire Hunger Solutions:

- Ms. Milliken is the Executive Director of New Hampshire Hunger Solutions.
- She noted rising costs for groceries, housing, and childcare are making it difficult for families to meet basic needs.
- She highlighted four policies excluded from the House budget and advocated for one included policy that would help children access school meals and healthy local food.
- She urged support for measures to eliminate shaming over school meal debt. Proposed solutions include Medicaid direct certification, free and reduced meal applications online, and expanded eligibility for free school meals.
- Ms. Milliken called for the adoption of the HB 73 amendment to ensure children are not caught in the middle of school debt collection, and endorsed a bipartisan Medicaid direct certification pilot. It would reduce hunger, lessen administrative burdens, and protect school funding formulas during a two-year trial period.

Shelly Gingras, Rochester:

- Mrs. Gingras and her husband are committed to the importance of public education for the benefit of our communities, for our state, and for our overall education.
- In 1784 our founders in New Hampshire wrote education into our Constitution because they believed it to be so important. It leads to the preservation of a free government. They saw it as a duty of legislators to actually cherish public schools.
- Most families cannot afford a private education. In fact, the only people who actually benefit from freedom accounts or vouchers are those who can already afford to pay for the entire cost. Their children are already attending private schools.
- The voucher system stabs at the heart of public education. Private schools take away public school money but they don't provide the same accountability as public schools. And they can reject students who may not be cost effective to educate.
- Please support increased school funding in our state budget for public schools and relieve the pressure on property taxes by ending the voucher system.
- We have an unbalanced formula for school funding as it is when our tax dollars are being given to wealthier families to support their private school educations. That money is not going to our public schools, where the majority of families must send their children.
- The loss of any tax money would only cause public schools to suffer, reducing access to programs, causing cuts, and dumbing down our whole system. In addition, voucher money going to private school families is not audited. We are not able to see where it's going, how much of it is going, or for how long. Some families are sending their students to out of state schools, and some families are even relocating out of state and bringing that voucher money with them.
- Let's not create a two-tiered system where the playing field is unbalanced.

Susan Stearns, Executive Director, NAMI New Hampshire:

- Ms. Stearns explained that the proposed budget would likely lead to longer wait times in emergency departments for psychiatric care and reverse recent progress from the Mission Zero initiative.
- The proposed cuts would impact crisis services, community-based care, and housing for people with mental illness. Medicaid provider rate cuts would also undermine the foundation of the community mental health system.
- She emphasized investments in the state's 10-year Mental Health Plan and Mission Zero are essential to restoring what was once one of the strongest mental health systems in the country.
- She urged the Senate to reverse these cuts and fund priority services such as the 988 crisis line, emergency behavioral health services, transitional housing programs, and homelessness services.

Jasen Stock, NH Timberland Owners Association:

- Specific to the Board of Tax and Land Appeals, land owners having an adjudicative body other than the Supreme Court to which an average citizen can come and bring a tax dispute for an easy and efficient resolution is important. That funding should be restored. Moreover, forcing some of these smaller types

of tax appeals into Superior Court is terribly inefficient and not a great use of the court's time and resources.

- To increase truck registration fees by as much as 50-60% in one fell swoop is a very big pill to swallow, particularly given the economic impacts that our industry is seeing with respect to some of the market tariffs. The association would suggest something much more gradual over time to allow folks to plan. That would be much more palatable.
- There are 2 energy-related policy bills that got put into HB 2. One is HB 219 and the other is HB 224. They both deal with the RPS program, which is of importance to the association because of its support for renewable energy. More specifically, these two policy items don't take effect for two years. They're important enough to merit a standalone analysis and study by the policy committee here in the Senate.

Robert Gillis, Executive Director, Monadnock Worksource:

- Monadnock Worksource is a small provider of disability services in the Monadnock region.
- Mr. Gillis has worked in the disability field for 40 years and has seen the true benefit of community-based services.
- Community-based services provide people with disabilities an opportunity to live valued and contributing lives in their local communities.
- Fully funding disability services is an investment. It's not charity; it provides opportunities for those with disabilities to be contributing members to our economy. It allows Mr. Gills to provide employment for his staff who deliver those services. Most importantly, it provides the opportunity for families to be involved in the workforce instead of being at home providing uncompensated care for their loved ones.
- All these people dressed in pink today would not be here if disability services were fully funded, if the Bureau of Developmental Services prioritized needs list was fully funded, and if Medicaid reimbursement rates were high enough to enable Mr. Gillis to provide his staff with health insurance and a livable wage.
- Reject HB 1 and HB 2. Fully fund disability services and look at the prioritized needs list for disability services. That is how we provide the support and lead New Hampshire.

Stefanie Griffin:

- Ms. Griffin is a licensed clinical psychologist and member of the New Hampshire Psychological Association (NHPA).
- She emphasized without providers, no one receives mental health services. Reductions in Medicaid reimbursement rates and funding for community mental health centers will worsen access to care.
- She shared findings from the 2023 NHPA mental health workforce survey, showing that 12% of providers plan to retire, 17% intend to reduce hours, and 8% plan to practice primarily out-of-state. The survey also found that only about 50% of providers currently accept Medicaid and 25% plan to leave one or more insurance panels in the coming years.

- Ms. Griffin warned that the workforce is aging, moving toward private pay, and already struggling with limited referral options. Approximately 73% of clinicians reported difficulty finding other providers for client referrals.
- Further cuts will deepen the mental health crisis in New Hampshire, reduce access for vulnerable populations, and contribute to rising suicide and overdose death rates.

Representative Heath Howard, Strafford County 4:

- Representative Howard represents the towns of Strafford and Barrington.
- This budget passed by the House is filled with an ideological agenda. These items take funds away from essential programs like Medicaid, and all levels of our public education system. We are giving away these already limited funds to allow for the very wealthiest in our state to take a subsidy for their child's private or religious school education. They do not need a handout, but we are choosing to give it to them over the real needs of people who rely on essential programs.
- We are removing the income verification for these private school vouchers and implementing it for those who are on Medicaid. We are also increasing premiums for those relying on Medicaid, which acts as a 5% income tax on the poorest.
- This is penny-wise but pound foolish. Individuals on Medicaid will avoid getting adequate care early, which only allows for easily preventable medical issues to become worse and more costly. We should be focused on restoring these basic services that people need to survive.
- We have the resources to cover the costs. We don't need to increase taxes but we need to be fiscally responsible and prioritize the actual needs of our constituents by restoring Medicaid funding. We will help people live their lives independently and assist them in being productive members of society.
- Just a couple of weeks ago nearly one thousand petitions were delivered to Governor Ayotte asking to support Medicaid.
- Support what Granite Staters need and restore Medicaid funding.

Rebecca Bryant, Lakes Region Community Services:

- Ms. Bryant urged the committee to recognize the repeated personal testimonies as evidence of an ongoing crisis faced daily by vulnerable residents.
- She mentioned New Hampshire has a bipartisan tradition of supporting people through strong public-private partnerships and a compassionate safety net.
- She urged the state to lead by example in valuing community and refusing to abandon the most vulnerable people.

Representative Mary Jane Wallner, Merrimack County 19:

- Representative Wallner provided each committee member with a document which contained HB 2 Amendment #1543h, and a spreadsheet outlining the funding adjustments contained in the amendment.
- The budget bill approved by the House reduced Governor Ayotte's proposed appropriations by over \$600 million, and would strain agencies and programs across state government if enacted.
- The House-passed budget threatens our ability to support New Hampshire's economy and protect our most vulnerable citizens.

- Amendment #1543h was developed and presented by House Democrats as an alternative to the budget recommended by the House Finance Committee Majority. It serves as a responsible blueprint to mitigate the most detrimental reductions enacted in the budget.
- The restoration of funds in Amendment #1543h is achieved through prudent fiscal measures. The first \$32 million in savings retains the Education Freedom Account eligibility cap at 350% of federal poverty level. It funds the program at Governor Ayotte's proposed appropriations.
- Amendment #1543h generates \$72 million by reverting to the Governor's recommended revenue-sharing model for video lottery terminals. For slot machines it proposes 45% to the state as opposed to the House-recommended 30%.
- There would be \$285 million in revenue projections, which is midpoint between those of the Governor, which were higher, and those of the House Ways and Means Committee, which were lower.
- While the appropriations contained in Amendment #1543h do not fully address every area of need, they represent a balanced and forward path for consideration.
- Mindful of our current fiscal conditions, Representative Wallner respectfully urged the committee to give consideration to this amendment as a fiscally responsible approach to maintaining essential services and supporting the long-term prosperity of New Hampshire.

Rep. Eileen Kelly, House District Merrimack 8:

- Representative Kelly read a statement unanimously supported at a Bradford town meeting calling for transparency and accountability in how taxpayer money is spent on education. The statement criticized the diversion of public funds to private and religious schools through Education Freedom Accounts. The statement noted the lack of accountability measures such as reporting fund usage, tracking student outcomes, and background checks for staff.
- The Town of Bradford urges elected officials to reject any expansion of taxpayer funding for private education until full accountability, transparency, and a sustainable funding plan are in place.

Atty. Leah Cole Durst, Shaheen & Gordon PA:

- Atty. Cole Durst has dedicated her practice to representing YDC victims over the past couple of years.
- It has been a privilege to work with YDC victims who bravely come forward and disclose their abuse to seek justice. They care deeply about their clients, the efficacy of the fund, and the trauma-informed nature in which it has been administered for the past two years.
- Adequately fund the YDC Settlement Claims Fund up to \$75 million as the statute requires. Currently, the \$10 million appropriated to the YDC Fund will set the state into default. There is currently \$26 million already committed to paying out victims who suffered abuse at YDC. The \$10 million will not suffice to adequately fund the fund. Even the \$26 million if provided will be seriously inadequate.

- Under the language of the existing statute these clients have existing, irrevocable and enforceable rights. Those rights are triggered by the filing of a claim and include a right to have their claims resolved by virtue of this existing process.
- For that reason and many more Shaheen & Gordon reject any attempts to revise the statute or the existing process, or defund or inadequately fund the Settlement Claims Fund, which has been working well for more than two years now.
- The current allocation of \$10 million for the next two years would cause this process to grind to a halt due to insufficient funding. This process has been working exactly as it was designed, and to such a degree of efficacy that the Attorney General's own projections at the outset of the claims fund in 2022 on the average claim amount are within mere dollars of the actual average claim award.
- As part of continuing forward with the existing statute and process it is essential that the resolution proceedings continue to occur. While we see an opportunity to add mediation to the existing process, mediation and the process at large will not work without resolution proceedings continuing to occur. In the alternate, if the Settlement Claims Fund becomes untenable given insufficient funding and claims are forced to go to court, we estimate the state's exposure will be in the amount of \$1.25 billion.
- Atty. Cole Durst believes we sometimes lose sight of how much \$1 billion is. The savings that adequately funding the statute could bring to the state, and what the state would save if it were adequately funded instead of forcing those claims to go to court. That amount is over \$700 million.

Atty. Paul Phillips, Plymouth:

- Attorney Phillips has been an attorney in private practice for 30 years. He served as a member of the New Hampshire Commission for Human Rights from 2014 to 2018 and as the Commission's Chair from 2015 to 2018.
- The vast majority of US states have state human rights commissions. These agencies allow individuals to file claims of discrimination and have them efficiently investigated and adjudicated by these special purpose administrative agencies. The only US states that don't have state human rights commissions are Arkansas, Alabama and Mississippi. This is not a club New Hampshire should be joining.
- It would send a very harmful message about New Hampshire's willingness and ability to address discrimination in employment, housing, public education and public accommodations. Please don't add New Hampshire to this list.
- This is a basic access to justice issue, but we're debating the state budget.
- The Human Rights Commission generates its own revenues to support 25%-30% of its operating budget. It does this through an annual contract with the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. This contract allows Granite Staters to file discrimination claims with the Human Rights Commission grounded in both state and federal law. The EEOC pays the Human Rights Commission to hear these cases. New Hampshire has had this

contract in place for several decades now. Abolishing the commission deprives the state of this federal revenue.

- In addition to leaving Granite Staters without an efficient and affordable forum for bringing these claims, the commission could also generate an additional 30%-40% of its operating revenues if this Legislature would make minor changes to our housing discrimination statute that would allow the state to contract with the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to hear joint federal and state housing discrimination claims. With appropriate legislative action this could go from a budget problem into a budget solution.
- We need significant reforms at the commission. Instead, this Legislature year after year asks the commission to do more with less. Most recently, the Legislature added public education to the Human Rights Commission's jurisdiction, without adding any new resources. The commission has been set up for failure, and lo and behold, the House budget declares it to be a failure.
- Atty. Phillips hopes the Senate can do better.

Susan Richman:

- Ms. Richman is a retired public school teacher.
- She cited a study showing the long-term benefits of well-qualified childcare, including higher employment and reduced incarceration.
- She referenced testimony from the BIA, stating that the lack of affordable childcare is a barrier to attracting workers to New Hampshire.
- She noted there are other infrastructure gaps further discouraging business growth.
- She emphasized defunding initiatives like the Renewable Energy Fund and changes to portfolio standards risk long-term savings for municipalities.
- She cited an April 2025 New Hampshire Fiscal Policy report that found that business tax cuts did not generate enough economic activity to cover revenue losses, contributing to the state's \$800 million deficit.

Jenny Horgan, Alzheimer's Association:

- Ms. Horgan is the Senior Public Policy Manager for the Alzheimer's Association.
- She testified in support of the Alzheimer's and Related Dementias Respite Grant Program and the State Commission on Aging,
- It is reported that over 26,500 Granite Staters live with Alzheimer's or Dementia. Approximately 48,000 unpaid caregivers provide over 77 million hours of care annually valued at \$1.8 billion.
- This grant program helps caregivers temporarily step away from caregiving by funding alternative care, which can prevent burnout and delay expensive long-term care placements, saving both families and the state money.
- The program currently has a waitlist and is projected to run out of funding before the end of the fiscal year, especially as public awareness increases demand.
- Ms. Horgan urged the Legislature to increase funding for this program.

Representative Timothy Horrigan, Strafford County 10:

- Representative Horrigan represents the town of Durham, which is the home of UNH.
- There are so many things that are bad about the House budget.

- The University System already has the lowest state funding of any system in the country, or it's in the bottom two, along with the Mississippi. We actually have an excellent University System, probably much better than we deserve based on what we contribute to it.
- The House has voted to take \$30 million out of what was already a fairly small \$100 million, out of a \$1 billion+ budget.
- An easy place to find that \$30 million is to eliminate the way the EFA or the school voucher program is designed. It is a very poorly designed program and not audited. Just pull the plug on the program and that would free up \$30 million for the University System, or a wide variety of other priorities.
- Something that is near and dear to Representative Horrigan's heart is disability rights. Medicaid funding is crucial for developmentally disabled adults.
- Committee members should seek out sources of revenue such as restoring the Interest and Dividends Tax.
- There are other taxes you could either roll back the decreases or bring back all together.
- The Governor and House Republicans proposed a small income tax on poor people, a 5% Medicare fee.
- There are other sources of revenue you can seek out.

Andrew Holmes, Department of Corrections:

- Mr. Holmes is the Administrator of Programs at the Department of Corrections. He spoke in opposition to the proposed budget cuts in HB 1, particularly regarding how they affect counselor case managers.
- Case managers are essential to inmate re-entry planning and providing intake assessments and referrals. They also handle administrative and legal processes.
- He emphasized cutting these positions would undermine re-entry success, increase recidivism risk, and disrupt a key part of the Department's strategy to support formerly incarcerated individuals.
- He noted the Department's recent reduction in recidivism was credited in part to the work of these case managers.

Samantha Pasciuto:

- Ms. Pasciuto is a senior psychiatric social worker who works within the Mental Health Department at the New Hampshire State Prison for Men.
- The budget passed by the House proposes the elimination of over 190 positions within the Department of Corrections, including roles that are vital both to mental health and rehabilitative services.
- While these programs may appear as mere numbers on paper they represent far more. They are programs, people and protections. They are lifelines for those within our system.
- Every day they provide care for incarcerated individuals struggling with severe mental illness, trauma and substance use disorders. Many of them have never had consistent access to mental health treatment prior to entering the Corrections system. They offer these individuals stability, coping skills and hope. These types of tools reduce violence, prevent suicide, and help prepare them for successful re-entry into our society. Without these services individuals don't improve; they deteriorate and act out. They return to our communities

without the support they need. Far too often they end up back in the Corrections system.

- Corrections is about more than just security. It's about treatment, rehabilitation, and preparing individuals for successful re-entry. Cutting case managers, teachers, and mental health professionals does not save money. It deepens the strain on an already burdened system.
- Multiple federal lawsuits have mandated the level of service which must be provided if those proposed cuts become law. Services will be severely compromised resulting in higher future costs in crisis response, emergency hospitalization, legal challenges and recidivism. These consequences won't stay within our prison walls. They will ripple throughout our hospitals, shelters and communities.
- Look beyond the numbers. These proposed cuts do not simply trim fat. They gut programs that save lives, protect staff, and give incarcerated individuals a meaningful path to rehabilitation.
- Ms. Pasciuto implored committee members to restore funding and reevaluate the method by which these positions were selected for elimination.

Judith Jones, New Hampshire Alliance for Healthy Aging:

- Ms. Jones advocated for funding programs that help older adults remain in their communities. She emphasized that these programs are cost-effective, as they help avoid more expensive long-term care.
- She called for fully funding the Choices For Independence (CFI) waiver program and opposed a 3% cut to Medicaid reimbursement rates due to ongoing workforce shortages.
- She expressed support for SB 122, which would expand the Medicare Savings Program to help low-income older adults afford uncovered Medicare costs.
- She highlighted the importance of the Caregiver Respite Program.
- She urged support for programs that utilize senior volunteers to meet community needs in a cost-effective way.
- She voiced support for the Commission on Aging, emphasizing its role in helping the state use its resources wisely.

Kevin Stevenson, Monadnock Family Services:

- Mr. Stevenson is the Director for Acute Care Services and Mobile Crisis.
- You have heard a little bit about the extensive wait times in emergency rooms for those suffering in psychiatric crisis.
- A permanent federal injunction put into place in New Hampshire in May of 2023 mandates that individuals cannot be forced to wait in emergency rooms in perpetuity while awaiting an inpatient psychiatric bed. Within 6 months of that injunction we had a zero wait time in the ER for people in psychiatric crisis.
- Mr. Stevenson's team interacts with this every day, dealing with individuals who are actively suicidal or otherwise in psychiatric crisis. Often times this results in an inpatient psychiatric admission, whether voluntary or involuntary. It is a real challenge for them.
- If we cut funding to the mental health system the Mission Zero Program will be placed in significant jeopardy. We can't go back in front of a federal judge again

and answer questions about why we were unable to continue the program, and why we're in violation of the permanent injunction.

- These proposed budget cuts also have some unintended consequences. Sometimes first responders are the ones who first come into contact with individuals in mental health crisis. If we cut funds the odds of us being able to provide assistance to those individuals is very slim.
- Mr. Stevenson understands the need to be fiscally responsible. The Number One investment we can make is in the people that we serve.

Kaitlyn Kelly, Monadnock Family Services:

- Ms. Kelly is the Director of Quality Assurance and Corporate Compliance at Monadnock Family Services. She spoke about the impact of the proposed budget cuts on community mental health.
- She emphasized the proposed cuts would severely impact their Assertive Community Treatment Program and their Supported Employment Program, which can be essential to maintaining individuals' Medicaid benefits.
- She urged legislators to reconsider these cuts, warning that they would significantly harm the state's mental health system.

Heather Young, Rochester:

- Mrs. Young's son, Lucas, is 14 years old and has a dual diagnosis of Down Syndrome and Autism. He requires a significant level of support to be successful and have access to his community.
- Mrs. Young urged committee members to fully fund developmental services and remove the 3% Medicaid rate reduction.
- Medicaid is more than a budget line item. It's a lifeline for people with disabilities and their families. It provides critical access to home and community-based services for people who live successfully with dignity and safely in their communities.
- These services are not luxuries. They're essential supports.
- Cutting Medicaid rates or eliminating services would have devastating consequences. It would force people like Lucas to be ripped away from his family and live in costly institutions most likely out of state, which will cost the state even more money than to support him in his loving home with his family.
- The in-home supports waiver administered through their area agency in the Bureau of Developmental Services is critical for their family. At almost 15 years old, Lucas still requires support for all aspects of his life. Mr. and Mrs. Young provide private insurance for him, offsetting the cost of Medicaid in the state as a secondary insurance for him. This helps to offset the cost of his feeding tube, supplies and the tracheotomies he's had over his lifetime. Lucas has endured more trauma than most adults that will ever experience in their life yet he does it with such bravery and strength. This is because of the high quality staff the Youngs have to support him at home.
- Please consider the real human cost of these proposed budget cuts. These costs will undoubtedly destroy the lives of the constituents that all of you represent.

Nicole Sheaff, Exeter:

- Ms. Sheaff is the mother of four children, one of whom has disabilities. She expressed concern about how budget cuts will affect her family's rights and access to services.
- She explained she had to quit her 20-year career as a pediatric occupational therapist to care for her children, relying on Granite State Medicaid for necessary services.
- Funds meant for waiver services are unused due to staffing shortages, leading to a lack of support.
- She warned cuts to the University System and special education services will drive professionals out-of-state and fail to meet legal obligations for students with disabilities.

Jodie Lubarsky, New Hampshire Community Behavioral Health Association:

- The work Ms. Lubarsky does in the nonprofit sector is incredibly important to her and to the families of New Hampshire.
- The previous state budget in 2023 sought to address the health care worker shortage with a 3% rate increase for providers who accept Medicaid. Many of those providers had not received a rate increase for decades. It was both meaningful and appreciated by providers in New Hampshire. It seemed to be a step forward to address the state's mental health crisis and workforce shortage.
- Ms. Lubarsky was invited by New Hampshire U.S. Senator Maggie Hassan to testify in front of the US Senate Committee on Finance to address the youth mental health crisis that was provoked by the pandemic.
- The House-passed budget reverses the progress made and is regressive.
- At the end of February 2025 there were 324 vacancies across the 10 community mental health centers; 298 of those vacancies were clinical positions. These vacancies impact critical and timely access to mental health care for the youth, families, and adults in our New Hampshire system.
- Ms. Lubarsky strongly urged committee members to reject the House-passed budget.
- Centers are unable to attract and retain employees. Instead, they are losing their employees to for-profit organizations that are publicly traded and can offer sign-on bonuses that they can never offer. They are the training institution for most mental health workers in this state, and yet are only able to retain their employees for 2-4 years.

Maureen Ryan, Greater Nashua Mental Health:

- Ms. Ryan is the COO of Greater Nashua Mental Health. She opposes the House version of the budget, particularly HB 2.
- She said doubling co-pays for Medicaid prescription drugs is a concern for community mental health centers serving vulnerable populations. This could lead to patients discontinuing medications and disrupting their treatment and stability.
- The 10 nonprofit mental health centers in New Hampshire serve over 50,000 individuals annually, with Medicaid covering a large portion of their revenue.
- She urged the committee to reject the proposed budget changes, as they would negatively affect Medicaid recipients, community mental health services, and the state.

Representative David Luneau, Merrimack County 9:

- Representative Luneau represents the people of Hopkinton, Bow and Concord.
- There is no greater statewide responsibility than our biennial budget.
- Eighteen towns took action on warrants included in town meetings and school district meetings this past spring opposed to expanding the EFA program. Those 18 included Bradford, Grantham, Hollis, Mont Vernon, New Boston, New London, Newport, Newbury, Pembroke, Plainfield, Rollinsford, Salisbury and Sunapee. All of these communities had either tallied or voice votes.
- It's time to stop taking marching orders from Free Staters and start listening to hardworking Granite Staters.

Sarah Gagnon, NH Community Behavioral Health Association:

- Ms. Gagnon is the Vice President of Clinical Operations at Riverbend Community Mental Health.
- She advocated for SB 114, which supports community and transitional housing through mental health centers. Without this bill, some centers may be forced to close existing mental health housing.
- The bill had no opposition and passed the House committee unanimously, but was tabled by the Senate. She hopes its provisions are included in the budget.

Cora Hoppe, Executive Director, Rochester Child Care:

- Ms. Hoppe lives each day in honor of the 13 friends she has lost to substance misuse in New Hampshire, and its devastating consequences.
- Her agency serves 300 families with 85 staff members who are being directly impacted by the growing child care crisis. This crisis affects all of us.
- Investing in child care yields one of the highest returns we can make as a state. It fosters healthy child development, provides safe and enriching environments for school-aged children, supports working families, and strengthens our economy. Without it parents lose income, businesses lose workers, and children lose access to critical support systems.
- In New Hampshire we're losing tens of millions of dollars annually when parents are forced to leave the workforce due to the lack of affordable, let alone, quality child care. That's why the New Hampshire Child Care Scholarship Program is essential. With the cost of annual child care exceeding \$32,000 a year with two young children, the scholarship is a lifeline.
- SB 243 is a smart, cost-effective solution. It streamlines paperwork for families, reduces administrative burdens for providers, and removes obstacles keeping parents out of the workforce.
- Support SB 243 and ensure its provisions are included in the state budget.
- Let's be clear, however. New Hampshire's child care system is in crisis. Chronic underfunding is pushing providers to the brink. At Ms. Hoppe's center they are losing their Early Head Start partnership after the closure of the regional federal office. This costs them \$70,000 annually.
- Due to a million dollar reduction in food bank funding, their summer feeding program is canceled. They cannot take the risk of losing that funding resulting in 125 school age children not receiving food during the summer.
- Our leaders should take meaningful action to restore education and adult education funding, expand investments in affordable housing, protect Medicaid

reimbursement rates, and provide funding for mental health supports, including substance misuse treatment and maternal care.

- Pass SB 243 to support families and providers alike. If these programs disappear our communities and our economy will pay the price.

Miriam Osofsky:

- Ms. Osofsky is the parent of a 28-year-old with developmental disabilities and autism, who is cared for by Siddharth Services in Manchester.
- Her child previously experienced abuse in a residential school and severe insomnia that made it unsafe for him to stay at home.
- She warned that cutting 3% from Medicaid would lead to understaffing, lower quality of care, and could recreate abusive conditions such as what her son has faced.

Julia Neily:

- Ms. Neily expressed support for funding Medicaid, the arts, and the judiciary system.
- As a former public defender, she saw how many services are intertwined.
- Special needs programs at her school helped her learn to speak despite severe hearing deficits with intensive speech therapy.

Bret Smith:

- Mr. Smith shared a personal story about his childhood trauma and abuse that led to long-term emotional and psychological struggles.
- After receiving intensive inpatient treatment for both medical and mental health needs, he began to recover but faced fear and uncertainty transitioning back into the community.
- Medicaid support during this period provided a crucial lifeline, enabling recovery and helping him rebuild his life.
- He urged the committee to preserve Medicaid funding, emphasizing its role as potentially lifesaving, short-term support that fosters resilience and recovery.

Johnathan Routhier, Executive Vice President, Mental Health Centers of Greater Manchester:

- The House budget makes drastic cuts to the state mental health system.
- Ten mental health centers are still recovering from 2023 Medicaid unwind.
- Mr. Routhier also advocated for SB 244 to address workforce shortages, and requested provisions from that bill be put into the budget.

Regan Lamphier, Nashua:

- Ms. Lamphier explained her son, who needed institutional-level care, was able to live at home thanks to a Medicaid waiver program. This enabled him to receive in-home care and public-school services, allowing her to continue working.
- She explained the proposed cuts to Medicaid and DHHS threaten the home and community-based care system that replaced institutionalization.
- She warned New Hampshire could revert to institutionalizing people with disabilities without adequate funding.
- She urged the committee to prioritize vulnerable citizens over tax cuts for the wealthy, emphasizing that fully funding Medicaid is both morally right and fiscally smart.

Joanne Linden, Chair, Citizens' Advisory Board, Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Services:

- Ms. Linden's current program goal is to stop the revolving door into jails and prisons and reduce recidivism by increasing employment and education.
- She is opposed to the House defunding the programs she believes address addiction, treatment and recidivism.

Laura Davies:

- Ms. Davies asked the Senate to fund the BDS. priority needs list. This means removing 3% Medicaid cut and not decreasing funding for disability services.
- She also asked the Senate to fund early support services, as they helped her be ready for school.
- She noted the importance of recreation funding and how it enables her to do activities that she enjoy and make her healthy.

David Zwald, Ashland:

- Mr. Zwald is a maintenance worker at the Department of Corrections.
- He testified against the proposed budget, which would eliminate his position among many others.
- His primary responsibility is maintaining and servicing locks, with additional duties regarding fire suppression, alarms, and security systems.
- He emphasized the prison infrastructure is very old and requires constant repair and custom fabrication.
- He noted the budget proposes cutting more than half of the Maintenance Department, despite the critical role they play in preventing facility failures.

Jennifer Foley, YDC Claims Administration, General Counsel:

- Ms. Foley spoke in support of adequate funding for the Youth Development Center Settlement Fund, highlighting the need to address decades of abuse claims.
- The current budget proposal in HB 2 underfunds the settlement process.
- She stressed the state's moral and legal obligation to address the harm done to vulnerable youth.
- She addressed mediation as a valid and existing option but emphasized it must be trusted by all parties and overseen properly to be effective.

Christine Phillips, Co-Founder, Friends of Aine Center for Grieving Children and Families:

- Ms. Phillips requests the Senate reinstate funding from Governor Ayotte's budget for juvenile peer-to-peer grief support services.
- Funding from the state to Friends of Aine enabled them to expand statewide and give over 250 hours of support in schools, connecting students across the state. Education projects are filling in gaps across the state.

Sandra Cannon, Atkinson:

- Ms. Cannon opposed the proposed budget's expansion of Education Freedom Accounts, while other essential programs face cuts.
- She praised the small increases in public education funding and called for those increases to continue annually.
- She criticized changes to the state's tax policy, noting they help the wealthy, while public schools and services are underfunded.

- She urged legislators to listen to public opposition to education freedom accounts voiced in hearings and town ballots.

Verna Sharpe, Rochester:

- Ms. Sharpe testified in support of Medicaid funding and area agency services, emphasizing their critical role in supporting her 33-year-old daughter with Smith-Magenis Syndrome.
- Her daughter has been receiving services from Community Partners for 20 years, allowing her to work, own a home, and contribute to the economy.
- Ms. Sharpe expressed frustration that basic care for the disabled, elderly, and poor is up for debate.
- She urged legislators to stop balancing the budget on the backs of the vulnerable and instead called for increased taxation on the ultra-wealthy.

David Hathcock, Public Defender:

- Mr. Hathcock urged legislators to fully fund indigent defense in New Hampshire to protect public safety and avoid legal and financial consequences.
- He warned we could face similar disruptions to other states that have underfunded indigent defense systems.
- He emphasized failing to fund the public defender system would force the state to rely on more expensive private counsel, ultimately costing the state more money.

Tia Winter, Lebanon School Board:

- Ms. Winter is a mental health care provider that works with Medicaid.
- She, and the Lebanon School Board, are requesting clarity on a number of the items in the budget.
- Her objections are how this bill undercuts special education, advocacy, DEI and student support.
- The implementation of open enrollment would make fiscally responsible budgeting impossible due to the requirement of new administrators and unreliable funding streams.
- The removal of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs undercuts students and leads to them not being supported.
- Reporting of child abuse is chilled when mandatory reporters must give their name and can be punished for false reports.

Dr. Ritu Ullal, Child Advocacy and Protection Program:

- Dr. Ullal spoke in support of funding the Office of the Child Advocate as a board-certified physician at Dartmouth Health.
- As a Child Advocacy and Protection (CAP) provider, she collaborates closely with DCYF, law enforcement, child advocacy centers, and health care professionals on cases involving child abuse, neglect, and substance exposure.
- She emphasized even with multiple professionals involved, critical details in child abuse cases can still be missed, which is why the Office of the Child Advocate is essential.

Elizabeth Kennett, New Hampshire Diabetes:

- Ms. Kennett is a registered nurse and diabetes care specialist, and supports funding for Medicaid.

- Medical expenses for those with diabetes are 2.6 times higher than those without.
- She requests that Medicaid be left at its current funding levels.

Nancy Vaughan, American Heart Association:

- Ms. Vaughan is the Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association in New Hampshire.
- She urged the committee to restore \$600,000 per year in funding for the state's Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Program.
- She advocated for restoring funding to the Liquor Commission's Enforcement Division, which helps enforce the minimum legal age for tobacco sales.
- She explained restoring the funding would use 0.25% of the \$220 million projected in tobacco excise tax revenue, helping offset the \$847 million in health care costs and \$640 million in productivity losses the state incurs annually from tobacco-related illnesses.

Jesse Cloutier, Cornish Public Schools:

- Mr. Cloutier opposes open education vouchers.
- He has been in public, private, religious and home school education systems.
- Vouchers destabilize larger systems by pulling funding from them for other schools.
- This takes money from the poor to give a financial cushion to the rich.
- Mr. Cloutier asked the committee to reject all language on open enrollment and school vouchers.

Christine O'Connor, Department of Corrections:

- Ms. O'Connor is a licensed clinical social worker and alcohol and drug counselor, currently serving in the Secure Psychiatric Unit (SPU).
- SPU is an involuntary psychiatric hospital located within the New Hampshire State Prison for Men, treating the most acutely mentally ill and violent patients in the state.
- She testified against HB 1, which proposes cutting four essential clinical positions at the SPU, including her own.
- She emphasized these cuts would jeopardize public and institutional safety, as SPU handles emergency transfers of patients with severe psychiatric and violent behavior from county jails and New Hampshire Hospital.

Heather Miville, Department of Corrections:

- Ms. Miville is an administrator and case manager at the Department of Corrections, working to lower recidivism and manage addiction.
- Staffing levels lower than what they are working at now are not possible for people who require a higher level of care to maintain a safe environment.
- She is asking the committee not cut any positions at the Department of Corrections.

Karin Mortimer, Merrimack:

- Ms. Mortimer is a parent of a child with cerebral palsy, whose educational and support needs are deeply impacted by the budget.
- She explained her family is impacted by Medicaid, mental health services, housing issues, and special education.

- She urged legislators to remember families like hers, stressing those testifying aren't asking for extras, but are fighting out of fear for essential services.

Nick Krakoff, Conservation Law Foundation:

- Mr. Krakoff stated that he is a senior attorney at the Conservation Law Foundation.
- He testified in opposition to several energy-related provisions in HB 2, including measures previously in HB 219 and HB 224.
- He emphasized that these changes would harm New Hampshire's economy, undermining a growing renewable energy sector that supports 3,500 jobs and has attracted \$800 million in solar investments.
- He cited a 2024 Department of Energy report showing the Renewable Energy Fund has leveraged \$460 million in clean energy investments and has directly benefited schools, towns, and small businesses across the state.
- He also raised constitutional concerns, arguing that diverting Renewable Energy Fund funding to the general fund would unlawfully convert a regulatory fee into a tax, violating the state constitution's requirements for tax uniformity.

Phyllis Mackey, Newfields:

- Ms. Mackey testified in opposition to HB 1 and HB 2, warning that proposed cuts will worsen New Hampshire's existing mental health crisis.
- She shared her personal experience as a former Medicaid provider, noting that she had to stop seeing Medicaid clients due to low reimbursement rates and ended services for children due to the lack of available specialized help.
- She criticized the proposed \$37 million cut to Community Mental Health Centers and the elimination of the Office of the Child Advocate, stating that these would further erode the state's already fragile safety net.

Tom Langlais, Epsom:

- Mr. Langlais stated that he is a former state representative.
- He testified in opposition to the elimination of 150 positions within the Department of Corrections, as proposed in HB 1 and HB 2.
- He emphasized the Department's essential role in ensuring public safety, especially considering the Governor's call for mandatory minimum sentences for fentanyl dealers. He stressed that these laws cannot be enforced without adequate staffing.

Sarah Skoglund, Strafford:

- Ms. Skoglund is a staff member in the Winnisquam Regional School District.
- She testified in defense of the New Hampshire Department of Education's Office of Student and Educator Wellness, which she said was mischaracterized as having unfilled positions in the House budget process.
- She emphasized the office's vital role in supporting Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports for Behavioral Health and Wellness (MTSS-B).
- She said the office has been instrumental in securing federal funding for school behavioral health initiatives and in offering ongoing technical assistance and training.
- The office has supported substance misuse prevention and MTSS-B exploration in 26 districts, and established a statewide professional network now including 164 school professionals.

Fern Seiden, Enfield:

- Ms. Seiden is the Director of Student and Staff Wellness for the Concord School District.
- She testified in opposition to the proposed elimination of 4 positions in the Department of Education's Office of Student and Educator Wellness.
- She praised New Hampshire for being a national leader by establishing the Office of Student and Educator Wellness in 2013.
- She explained MTSS-B is a public health model for schools, ensuring all students receive universal support, early intervention, and intensive help when needed.
- She argued eliminating these coaching positions would undermine a successful, research-based system that improves student outcomes and supports educator effectiveness across the state.

Kate Frey, New Futures:

- Ms. Frey stated that she is the Vice President of Advocacy at New Futures.
- She is testifying in opposition to several provisions in HB 1 and HB 2, warning that they would harm health, wellness, and substance use treatment systems in New Hampshire.
- She criticized using the Opioid Abatement Trust Fund to fund the Alcohol Fund, as it would restrict spending to opioid-related services only and eliminate \$10.7 million for broader substance use prevention and treatment efforts, including alcohol and stimulants.
- She urged for the continued funding of the Alcohol Fund at 5% of liquor gross profits, restoration of general funds to the Tobacco Prevention and Control Program, and protection of the Governor's Commission programming.
- She strongly supports full funding for the children's system of care, including the Office of Student and Educator Wellness, the Children's System of Care Resource Center, and the inclusion of Senate bills 128, 255, and 243.
- Ms. Frey opposed the elimination of PDAB, the 3% Medicaid reimbursement cut, new CHIP/Medicaid cost-sharing, and the proposed ban on DEI-related contracts.

Sandra Woodman, Community Mental Health Centers:

- Ms. Woodman stated that she is the director of Youth and Family Services at Community Partners of Strafford County, as well as a licensed mental health counselor.
- She said the DEI provision was added without a public hearing or input and lacks a direct budget appropriation. She emphasized that it should be treated as a policy issue through a separate bill.
- She questioned the need for this provision and emphasized that community mental health centers already face complex administrative burdens and workforce shortages. She said the DEI provision would only add unnecessary strain and urged for its removal from HB 2.

Victor Demeroto, Department of Corrections:

- Mr. Demeroto testified in opposition to the proposed budget as a Financial Agent for the Department of Corrections, whose position would be eliminated by proposed cuts.

- He explained Financial Agents play a critical role in collecting court-ordered restitution from offenders and ensuring payments are made to victims. He noted over 23,000 victims in New Hampshire are currently awaiting restitution.
- These situations are handled by 3 full-time and 1 part-time financial agents covering the entire state.
- Mr. Demeroto emphasized approving the budget as proposed would effectively eliminate restitution enforcement and harm crime victims.

Kirk Williamson, Prescription Drug Affordability Board:

- Mr. Williamson stated that he is the Executive Director of the New Hampshire PDAB.
- He highlighted the impact of high drug prices in New Hampshire, noting that 53% of residents worry about affording their prescriptions and 25% skip medications due to cost.
- He emphasized that prescription drug costs burden families, taxpayers, and Medicaid.
- He outlined PDAB's recent achievements, including their collaboration with the Governor's office on a state discount card, legislation enabling biosimilar drug substitution, and a report identifying 3 drugs responsible for \$33 million in increased costs in 2023.
- He urged the Senate to restore PDAB's funding as included in the Governor's budget.

Stephen Hamilton, New Hampshire Board of Tax and Land Appeals:

- Mr. Hamilton stated that he is a property assessment professional and former Review Appraiser for the New Hampshire Board of Tax and Land Appeals.
- He explained that 80% of property tax appeals go through the Board, not the superior court, due to its affordable filing fees and accessible process.
- Mr. Hamilton warned that without the board, taxpayers would be forced into costly superior court litigation, making justice inaccessible for lower-dollar disputes.
- He noted that municipalities also benefit from the Board, as they typically don't need to hire attorneys for Board hearings but would incur legal costs if appeals shift to the court system.
- He urged the Senate to restore funding to this agency, noting that it fosters taxpayer trust in the system and promotes equitable resolution through structured mediation.

Sarah Sadowski, Concord:

- Ms. Sadowski is the mother of a disabled 16-year-old. She spoke against the underfunding of public and early education, expressing concern about cuts to Medicaid and disability services.
- She explained the administrative burden of navigating private insurance and warned if Medicaid premiums are implemented, her family would likely drop private coverage, thus shifting costlier care onto the state.
- She criticized the proposed elimination of the PDAB and acknowledged the current cost pressures on families and the state.

- She stated true fiscal responsibility would be addressing private insurance inefficiencies, drug pricing, and school voucher subsidies, rather than cutting essential services.
- She asked the committee to reject HB 1 and HB 2 in their current forms and support a budget that reflects long-term spending that saves money and protects vulnerable populations.

Lacey Fehrenbach, Auburn:

- Ms. Fehrenbach explained the programs facing cuts are essential investments in people, emphasizing that cutting them will undermine community health, safety, and long-term growth.
- She emphasized access to resources like education, Medicaid, mental health care, housing, and therapies improve public safety and quality of life for everyone.
- She urged the committee to reject this budget and invest in the people of New Hampshire.

Michael Bessette, SAU 65-Kearsarge:

- He is the assistant superintendent of Kearsarge Regional School District which serves seven towns in central New Hampshire.
- Thousands of Granite Staters support strong, accountable public education. In January, more than sixteen hundred residents attended the annual district meeting to vote on a last-minute proposal that would have cut \$10 million from the school budget and capped future spending. That proposal was rejected by ninety-two percent of voters because it would have eliminated their school's critical support positions and reduced services for students with special needs.
- The community response to that proposal reflected a shared belief in maintaining fiscally responsible, academically sound, and locally governed schools.
- New Hampshire students rank in the top ten percent nationally for reading and in the top twelve percent for math. However, communities like Kearsarge are forced to choose between significant tax burdens or reduced educational services. This is a result of the funding model that relies too heavily on property wealth instead of student need.
- School districts are not asking for unchecked spending, they are asking for a responsible, stable, and constitutional funding solution that allows communities to plan with predictability and ensure that students have access to an adequate education regardless of their zip code.
- Local taxpayers have consistently stepped up; it is time for the State to start meeting its own obligation. Remove amendments from the budget which would continue to expand opportunity gaps and increase the cost burdens to local communities.
- Send open enrollment back for further study and let it develop.

Maggie Baumer, Hanger Inc:

- Ms. Baumer stated that she is an upper-limb amputee representing the Hanger Clinic.
- She emphasized how reduced funding would affect the health and mobility of New Hampshire's residents with limb loss or limb difference.

- She urged the Committee to include SB 132 in the budget, which would extend coverage for activity-specific prosthetic devices to adults.
- She cited data showing that the fiscal impact of SB 132 would be minimal, while offering millions in long-term health care savings by preventing costly secondary conditions.

Virginia Cannon:

- She has a child whose genetic disorder puts her in a wheelchair most days and has a developmental disability that makes it hard to get her engaged in physical therapy. She and her child's father have not asked the State for assistance for the majority of her child's life.
- She did not like paying taxes but was willing to pay because it supported people who were not as privileged as her family.
- She paid for her child to go to private school to help get her the best help possible. She paid property taxes to fund the public school, and it was their decision to pay tuition for private school. Education funding to send wealthy people's children to private school with public dollars is not an appropriate use of tax dollars.
- She suggested reinstating the interest and dividends tax, which she paid, and re-upping the business profits tax and the business enterprise tax.
- People do not like taxes, but they are the cost of living in a healthy society.

Deane Kellison, Benton:

- Ms. Kellison explained she became unable to care for herself following the death of her partner and a series of serious medical conditions. She was connected to Riverbend, where a Medicaid-funded case manager helped her access medication, medical care, and basic needs. Due to this support, she has recovered and now lives a stable life.
- She emphasized without Medicaid, she likely would have ended up in jail, emergency rooms, or institutional care, all of which would have cost the state significantly more than the Medicaid support she received.

Karen Trudel:

- In the budget two years ago, providers were given a three percent increase that this budget takes away.
- She questioned why this budget proposes a \$40 million cut to mental health centers. In 2024, Riverbend in Concord had to stop seeing three hundred patients and was quoted saying they are not being compensated enough.
- Transitional housing is a big problem. There is not enough transitional housing for the mentally ill and substance use patients. Staffing is another issue in this housing.
- She expressed concern about 988 and crisis intervention services.

Joanne Langlais, Department of Corrections:

- Ms. Langlais is a Financial Services staff member at the Department of Corrections.
- She opposes the proposed job cuts under HB 1 and HB 2, emphasizing department staff are essential to the functioning of state prisons.

- Prison-related administrative tasks will remain constant unless the prison population declines. Cutting positions would force untrained staff or corrections officers to absorb complex duties, leading to inefficiency and risk.
- She emphasized many prison expenses are legally mandated, and eliminating jobs won't change those obligations unless laws themselves are rewritten.

Miranda Lane, Brigid's House of Hope:

- Ms. Lane is a licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor and the Executive Director of Brigid's House of Hope, a non-profit that provides long-term supportive housing to survivors of human trafficking in New Hampshire.
- Human trafficking is something that many do not believe happens here, but it happens all the time. She spoke on behalf of some of the most vulnerable people in the state, survivors who have faced unimaginable exploitation. The decisions made on the budget will determine whether those individuals find stability, safety, and healing or whether they will fall through the cracks.
- Every system functions exactly the way it was designed, which means that our design is bad. Budgets build those designs.
- The mental health workforce shortage has been ongoing for decades.
- Increase investments in affordable and supportive housing, including transitional housing. Research shows that without safe housing survivors are at risk of being re-exploited. Ensure shelters are adequately reimbursed to provide crisis care.
- The state needs more long-term housing like Brigid's House, which was created at the request of the New Hampshire Task Force Against Human Trafficking. In 2018, there was no housing specific to survivors of trafficking in New Hampshire.
- Mental health and Medicaid reimbursement directly impacts access to trauma-informed care. She told the story of a survivor who has mental health issues, chronic illness, and a long-term disability as a result of her exploitation and abuse. That survivor's out-of-pocket medical expenses were \$19,000 and her annual income is \$17,000.
- The budget has the potential to be a beacon of hope, especially for survivors of trafficking.

Gemma Soldati, Somersworth:

- Ms. Soldati is an internationally recognized performer who left New Hampshire due to the lack of artistic opportunities, but later returned and revived her career with support from the State Council on the Arts.
- The funding she has received has enabled her to perform and contribute to venues across the state and work with at-risk youth.

Alexis Wilbur:

- Ms. Wilbur voiced opposition to open enrollment. Mandatory open enrollment has consequences that introduce chaos into the system and would challenge the performance of schools across the state.
- Cornish voters made decisions at the local level to ensure the town's relevance in a changing world. Eight years ago, Cornish seceded from a larger multi-school district to become their own SAU. Since then, they have seen test scores increase and have almost doubled the school's population.

- Mandatory open enrollment and the funding formula has 80% of ascending district's pupil costs going to the receiving district. This is fiscally irresponsible. It runs counter to the New Hampshire spirit of local control. In a state where approximately 70% of each district's school budget is from locally-raised tax dollars, the system mandates how these dollars are spent and overrides local decision making. It does not solve a problem, it creates one.
- New Hampshire already has laws and systems in place that allow districts to offer choice to families and students in many small districts like Cornish. Towns negotiate tuition agreements with other districts for options for high school.
- Charter schools and homeschooling already provide mechanisms and solutions to situations given as reasons by the prime sponsor for changing the system.
- If the goal is to increase performance a study entitled, "Effects of Open Enrollment on School Choice and Student Outcomes," demonstrates it does not. The study found those students who opt out of their default public schools often perform significantly worse on standardized tests than similar students who stayed behind.

Kaitlin Martineau, Merrimack County Child Advocacy Center:

- Ms. Martineau is a Forensic Interviewer with the Merrimack County Child Advocacy Center. She shared her experience working with victims of child sexual and physical abuse in New Hampshire.
- She explained the function of child advocacy centers, where professionals from law enforcement, CPS, prosecution, medicine, mental health, and victim advocacy collaborate to holistically address child abuse cases.
- She addressed concerns the Office of the Child Advocate is a duplicative service and stated that it is essential to child safety and not redundant. She urged the committee to fully fund the Office of the Child Advocate.

Emily Coutermarsh:

- Ms. Coutermarsh works with children with developmental disabilities and acquired brain injuries. The individuals and families she supports critically depend on services funded through Medicaid and other supported services.
- She related a success story from her time at Plymouth State University. She was working as a licensed nursing assistant. When her parents turned sixty-five she was taken off their insurance and put on Medicaid. She depended on health, dental, and vision insurance, as well as food stamps. The people she serves now are dependent on those systems.
- Cuts to Medicaid, developmental disabilities, acquired brain injuries, in-home supports, and University funding would have devastating consequences for families who are already stretched thin.
- Many caregivers are unable to work due to their loved ones' needs. They rely on Medicaid not only for medical coverage but for food assistance as well.
- To address these challenges and avoid strain, she asked for the state to reinvest in community-based care. Expand Medicaid flexibility with waivers to allow tailored coverage that would help those with developmental disabilities.
- Create public and private partnerships. Many organizations are willing to step in with the right incentives and help share the burden of care costs while maintaining quality of service, audits, and relocating inefficient spending.

- Strengthen the workforce by investing in our state’s vulnerable populations and the University System.

Meredith Hatfield, The Nature Conservancy:

- Ms. Hatfield urged the removal of HB 219 and HB 224 from HB 2, agreeing with environmental and industry leaders who say these would undermine the state’s clean energy economy.
- She advocated for the Renewable Energy Fund to be spent as intended on eligible energy projects to benefit a wide range of ratepayers.
- She requested the Senate exempt Fish and Game funds from the proposed 5% administrative fee on dedicated funds to preserve essential conservation and wildlife programs.

Lisa Beaudoin:

- Ms. Beaudoin is a disability policy professional who owns Strategies for Disability Equity. Her son is on Medicaid’s developmental disability waiver. She is opposed to this budget.
- It is morally reprehensible that New Hampshire cut business taxes and has eliminated the dividends tax while austerity is being hoisted onto the backs of Medicaid recipients for the purpose of offsetting the state’s decision to reduce tax obligations for those with portfolios.
- The Interest and Dividends Tax was \$184 million, 7% of General Funds that are now off the table in revenue. She asked for an amendment to reinstate the Interest and Dividends Tax. Revenue cannot be left off the table when creating a budget.
- New Hampshire has legal obligations under RSA 171-A which mandates that the New Hampshire Legislature fully fund the adult developmental disability service system. In simple terms, this means no waitlists for services.
- When services are not adequately funded families are forced to step up as unpaid caregivers. This costs families \$339 million per year.
- Medicaid needs more funding. It would be prudent to request that DHHS conduct a cost-benefit analysis. Every other state that has implemented premiums or work requirements has found that administrative and implementation costs far outweigh any projected savings.
- Ms. Beaudoin questioned what the state would do about the serious effort at the federal level to cut Medicaid.

Bonnie Dunham, Merrimack:

- Ms. Dunham explained her 44-year-old son with developmental disabilities lives a full life thanks to Medicaid-funded services.
- After his long-term direct support provider retired, Ms. Dunham and her husband have been providing full-time care while struggling to find a new provider, due to low wages and workforce shortages.
- She emphasized without proper funding to pay these providers a living wage, families like hers cannot continue supporting their loved ones at home, even though doing so saves the state significant money compared to institutional care.

Anna O’Hara:

- Ms. O'Hara stated her opposition to HB 1 and HB 2. They are bad bills and are an insult to the people who voted.
- This budget slashes health care, guts education, eliminates watchdog agencies, and expands giveaways to private interests, while fast-tracking tax breaks for the wealthiest Granite Staters.
- This bill is not responsible government, it is deliberate neglect.
- Medicaid cuts co-pays for the poorest, less mental health support, and substance misuse programs at a time when communities are already struggling.
- Massive cuts to higher education and the elimination of scholarships when we are already losing young people to other states.
- With the elimination of the Office of the Child Advocate, the Human Rights Commission, and the Art Council, Ms. O'Hara questioned what message that sends about what and who the New Hampshire government values.
- The budget process felt rushed, closed off, and designed to keep public voices out. That is not democracy, it is damage control.
- These are not just line items on a spreadsheet, these are people's lives. This budget abandons them, and voters will not forget who turned their backs on them.

Ken Philips, Peterborough:

- Mr. Philips explained his daughter chose to go to UNH despite having comparable financial aid offers from out-of-state schools. He emphasized this shows the value and competitiveness of New Hampshire's public university system.
- He emphasized the importance of retaining young talent in New Hampshire and the benefits it provides to local communities.
- Mr. Philips warned cutting \$30 million from the University budget would directly undermine opportunities and diminish the state's ability to attract and retain students.

Representative Jerry Stringham, House Finance Committee:

- Representative Stringham discussed simple things to increase revenues:
- Video lottery terminals (VTs). The Governor's budget authorized a revenue distribution of VTs at 55% to casino operators and 45% to the state. The House budget is built on 30% to the state. A better budget takes into account some of the concerns in the House by providing operators with 65% of the revenue for the first year, but returning to a 55/45 split after that. This change brings an additional \$72 million into the State Education Trust Fund.
- A second source of revenue comes from rolling back the expansion of EFA vouchers. A compromise would keep the EFA eligibility the same as it is today, funding the program at the Governor's Fiscal Year 2026 level.
- A compromise budget restores cuts to economic drivers like tourism development and the arts, which continue to stimulate New Hampshire's business growth. Doing so allows the state to use revenue projections between the Governor and the House amounts. This would bring in an additional \$285 million over the biennium as compared to the House budget.
- Tobacco taxes are being raised substantially in neighboring Vermont and Maine. He suggested New Hampshire follow the recommendations and requests

of the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society by raising the cigarette tax by \$1 per pack. New Hampshire would still have by far the lowest cigarette tax in the Northeast. The increase would only represent a cost-of-living increase since it was set at \$1.78 per pack in 2008. The cost-of-living adjustment would raise \$50 million to \$90 million for the biennium.

- The budget should include a new revenue source: the sale of the Sununu Center. The budget should provide for a sale of the center and the 150 acres it sits on.

Dr. Janet Perkins Howland:

- Dr. Perkins Howland stated that she strongly supports Momnibus 2.0 as an OB-GYN with nearly 30 years of experience in New Hampshire.
- She emphasized the importance of improving care in rural areas, noting that a pregnant patient in the North Country had to use a sled and snowmobile to access prenatal care.
- She said there is an urgent need to address perinatal mental health and praised provisions of the bill including mental health screening at pediatric visits and a mental health hotline for complex psychiatric cases.
- She emphasized that Momnibus 2.0 is pro-New Hampshire, pro-family, and fiscally prudent.

Micaela Demeter:

- She is a Dover School Board member and is on staff for the New Hampshire School Funding Fairness Project.
- She shared testimony from four people who could not make the hearing: Jenna Hardy from the Merrimack School Board, Janine Leser from the ConVal School Board, Curtis Hamilton from the ConVal School Board, and Curtis Register from the Durham Town Council.

Doug Marino, Brentwood:

- Mr. Marino urged the Senate to restore funding to New Hampshire's regional planning commissions.
- He emphasized that regional planning commissions play a crucial role in planning for housing, transportation, and coastal resilience.
- He explained that small investments in planning yield significant long-term returns and emphasized that cutting this funding for short-term savings is counterproductive.

Michelle St. John, Northern Human Services:

- Provided written testimony from families who receive services and support from Northern Human Services, a dual state agency that is designated not-for-profit. The agency provides developmental disability service programs and supports and serves the community mental health center for the most vulnerable residents in Carroll, Coos, and upper Grafton counties.
- The big issues are the three percent Medicaid cut, fully funding the wait list, and fully funding community mental health and behavioral health in the community.
- She explained that she provides housing, nutrition, and activities of daily living for her eighty-seven-year-old mother. She urged the Committee to ensure funding for long-term support and services, including Medicaid, for the oldest and most medically vulnerable senior citizens.

- She urged the Committee to treat every resident of the state as individuals who deserve equal rights to healthcare, housing, public bathroom access, and team sports safety education. New Hampshire's LGBTQ community should not be subjected to legislation that marginalizes them or takes away their rights as human beings. She urged the Committee to not include any policies in HB 2 that would take away their rights.

Kelli Twiss, Kingston:

- Ms. Twiss criticized the proposed budget cuts, noting they would cause harm to people in New Hampshire, especially regarding Medicaid, education, and disability services.
- She opposed the use of the budget to fund tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy, while simultaneously cutting essential services for the poor and middle class.
- She opposed the inclusion of HB 48, describing it as discriminatory.

Annie Hopkins, Portsmouth:

- Ms. Hopkins shared a personal story about her experience with severe depression, anxiety, and panic attacks postpartum. While she completed a depression screening at her son's 6-month pediatric visit, she did not receive any follow up from her OB-GYN, despite her high score.
- She described the difficulty in accessing care and emphasized Momnibus 2.0 would close these care gaps, provide critical perinatal mental health support, and ensure mothers are not left to suffer in silence. She urged the committee to include this in the budget.

Lucas Coriaty, University of New Hampshire Student:

- Mr. Coriaty stated that he is speaking in opposition to the proposed cuts to UNH, expressing concerns about both the university system and broader social services.
- He criticized the school voucher program, explaining that it diverts funds to wealthy families and programs without proper standards or oversight.
- He noted that 50-60% of UNH graduates stay in New Hampshire, urging the Committee to recognize the long-term economic and community value of investing in higher education.

Mariam Levy, Exeter:

- Ms. Levy is the mother of 3 children in public school and a school consultant.
- She spoke against the anti-DEI language incorporated into the budget.
- She emphasized DEI means acknowledging diversity, providing equitable support, and fostering inclusion principles. She believes this is fundamental to a healthy, educational environment.
- She raised concerns about broad language in the proposed policy, which she explained could make teachers afraid to discuss inclusion or meet students' emotional and social needs.
- She noted federal courts have ruled similar language unconstitutional and she criticized the penalties for violations.

Brian Harlow:

- Mr. Harlow spoke in support of fully funding the Alcohol Fund, noting it is a key source of support for substance use disorder prevention, treatment, and recovery.
- He emphasized that the Alcohol Fund is legally mandated to receive 5% of gross alcohol profits, which would amount to \$12 million this year, yet it has been chronically underfunded.
- He credited himself being sober for 32 years to his access to evidence-based treatment made possible through his parents' health insurance.
- He urged the Committee to recognize that not everyone has access to private insurance, and fully funding the Alcohol Fund is critical to help others recover.

Senator Debra Altschiller, District 24:

- Senator Altschiller relayed concerns from constituents of the Seacoast region who could not attend in person.
- She highlighted public opposition to expanding the school voucher program, especially while public schools remain underfunded. She condemned the proposed cuts to the university system as well.
- She shared stories from her constituents including families depending on Medicaid, support professionals, and county action partnerships serving tens of thousands of low-income residents.
- She opposed the proposed elimination of the Office of the Child Advocate, emphasizing its critical role in independent oversight of child welfare.
- She urged the Committee to not zero-out the settlement fund for survivors of abuse at the Sununu Youth Development Center, noting that there are 800 pending claims.

Chief Kevin Roarke, Nashua Police Department:

- Chief Roarke urged the committee's support for the provisions dealing with Group II retirement benefits.
- The department is currently down 17 officers, with their full allotment being 182.
- They face public safety employment, recruitment, and retention issues like so many other communities across the state. Recruitment is difficult but retention has been far more difficult the past few years.
- Being a police officer isn't like it was a few years ago. With those challenges comes the need to keep our experienced officers on the job.
- Over the past 5 years they've had 44 resignations. They've never seen that before. Those officers range from 6 months to 17 years. Out of the 44 resignations 28 left the profession altogether to work in the private sector. A vast majority of these people cited the changes in the retirement system as a reason for leaving.
- They've also had 30-35 full retirements. These are officers with 20+ years of service.
- Over the last 5 years they lost 43% of their staff. That creates a significant problem in so many ways. The valuable experience and training lost is not replaceable for many years to come. At this rate it will never be replaced.
- They are faced more and more with the need to hire brand new recruits. They used to have an ocean full of candidates to choose from. Today, it looks more

like a puddle to choose from. Years ago we would have 400-500 individuals taking our police exam. Last month we had 9.

- Chief Roarke has been a police officer for almost 29 years and he has never seen it this bad.
- We have to do something to stop the bleeding. Every time we fill a vacant position with a new recruit we face the cost of paying a salary, being trained,
- getting uniforms, receiving proper equipment, and getting certified as a full-time police officer. We are also backfilling with overtime.
- From when Chief Roarke swears in a new police officer it takes 30 weeks until they're serviceable in the community. In those 30 weeks it cost the city, taxpayers, and our police department \$45,000. That breaks down to \$7,000 for training and equipment and \$38,000 for health care.

Mackenzie Nicholson, Senior Director, Moms Rising - New Hampshire:

- Ms. Nicholson stated that budgets are moral documents — they should reflect shared values. This budget doesn't reflect the values of the families she speaks with every day.
- Ms. Nicholson said the House version of the budget bill is not a budget bill, it's a policy bomb. It includes rollbacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion, attacks on LGBTQ+ Granite Staters, and distracts from the real issues families face: the childcare crisis, rising grocery costs, and unaffordable medications.
- She said this budget proposes deep cuts to health care, mental health, and housing.
- It reduces funds for childcare and public schools despite rising costs and eliminates all state funding for family planning.
- Ms. Nicholson stated that this expands Education Freedom Accounts, diverting public funds from the schools serving most of our kids, and introduces new Medicaid cost-sharing — effectively taxing our most vulnerable residents.
- The budget ignores looming federal cuts and leaves families unprotected. She expressed that we should be strengthening these essential programs, not gutting them.
- Ms. Nicholson said New Hampshire is underfunding critical systems because of years of tax breaks for businesses and the ultra-wealthy.
- She expressed that New Hampshire needs bold investments in childcare, Medicaid, and public schools. New Hampshire families didn't ask for this budget. They're speaking out — and moms are watching.

Seana Hallberg:

- Ms. Hallberg stated she is raising children with special needs the system often fails to address.
- Her adult son attends Landmark College, a school for students with disabilities. It took years of advocacy to get him there, and even with vocational rehab assistance, tuition is a major burden.
- She said that Medicaid is essential to supporting his needs in college — without it, they couldn't afford the services that allow him to succeed.
- Her second son is heading to the University of New Hampshire to study mechanical engineering. Even with a merit scholarship, in-state tuition exceeds \$40,000.

- This budget cuts critical funding to higher education and dismantles diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- She stated that families like hers are already struggling to access the resources and opportunities our children need.
- Ms. Hallberg expressed that these proposed cuts will worsen already overwhelming financial and emotional burdens.

Jennifer Smith:

- Ms. Smith stated that the House budget is “penny wise and pound foolish,” and without changes, it will worsen conditions for low-income and marginalized residents.
- She emphasized that New Hampshire isn’t in a financial crisis; it doesn’t need cuts or need to raise dedicated funds that support critical programs like community solar.
- A successful path forward requires a thoughtful, well-crafted compromise that can gain support from both the House and the Governor.

Tye Thompson:

- They oppose the proposed budget bills, which would slash critical services, including Medicaid for people with disabilities, mental health funding, family planning, and support for vulnerable populations. It is diverting public education funds to expand Education Freedom Accounts.
- They stated the bills also undermine civil rights, especially for transgender individuals, by embedding harmful policy language into fiscal legislation that limits access to health care, education, employment, and DEI efforts.

Jodi Langellotti:

- Ms. Langellotti has owned her home for nine years, and in that time, its assessed value nearly doubled. Her property taxes — now nearly \$10,000 — continue to rise, with roughly 40% going to local schools.
- Some of that money now funds Education Freedom Accounts — even for families already using private schools.
- This budget includes policies that cut social services and health care for those who need it most, while removing income caps from EFAs and allowing any student to attend any statewide school, regardless of the strain on receiving districts or local taxpayers.
- Tuition costs \$8,000 to \$35,000 a year. She expressed that if she can’t afford it, lower-income families certainly can’t without major scholarships.
- As an active PTA member, she watched teachers request funding for basic needs like recess equipment, classroom furniture, gym gear, microphones, and nurse supplies.

Representative Jonah Wheeler:

- Rep. Wheeler stated that the House passed HB1/HB2 slashing the Department of Corrections budget without consulting Commissioner Helen Hanks and held only one public hearing, which is inadequate given the impact on many people.
- He said that legislators are responsible for managing a \$16.5 billion budget and must ensure constituents have meaningful opportunities to participate in the process.

- He suggested alternative revenue options, such as a small increase in the rooms and meals tax or property tax equalization, which could bridge budget gaps without tax hikes.

dm/bb

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