

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Joshua Schauer 271-3077

SB 450-FN, relative to a state parks pass pilot program for recovery centers and community mental health centers.

Hearing Date: January 15, 2026

Time Opened: 1:00 p.m.

Time Closed: 1:08 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Avard, Pearl, McConkey, Watters and Rosenwald

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill requires the establishment of a 3-year pilot program for state parks passes for community mental health centers registered with the department of health and human services.

Sponsors:

Sen. Watters

Sen. Pearl

Sen. Avard

Sen. Fenton

Sen. Gannon

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Rep. J. MacDonald

Rep. Gregg

Who supports the bill: 14 Individuals signed in support of the legislation. Please contact Joshua.Schauer@gc.nh.gov for more information

Who opposes the bill: 0 people signed in Opposition of the legislation.

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator David Watters, District 4

- Senator Watters explained that the proposal recognizes the significant mental health benefits of outdoor recreation, particularly access to parks and natural spaces. Research consistently shows that time spent outdoors can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, and can support overall mental wellness.
- A letter from the Department of Natural Resources was provided outlining the benefits of outdoor recreation and supporting the concept of expanded access to parks for therapeutic and wellness purposes.

- The bill authorizes the state's 10 community mental health centers to receive a park pass. These passes would allow the centers to provide their clients with access to parks as part of mental health treatment and recovery support.
- The anticipated cost of the program is minimal, the LBA estimated approximately \$100, because a similar park pass program is already provided to libraries. This bill essentially extends an existing model to mental health centers.
- The program is structured as a pilot program, allowing the state to evaluate its effectiveness and usage before considering long-term or broader implementation.
- He pointed to a drafting error in the bill regarding the sunset date. The repeal date should be 2029, not the currently listed year, 2027. Specifically, line 14 of the bill, which references the repeal day, needs to be corrected to reflect a 2029 repeal date.
- It was noted that a similar version of this bill received favorable consideration in a previous session; however, that version included recovery organizations and died. Those organizations have been removed from the current bill in order to address concerns and improve the bill's chances of passing the House.

Senator McConkey asked for clarification on whether the park pass would provide access only to state-owned parks, indicating a need to confirm or specify the scope of park access authorized under the bill.

Senator Watters affirmed that it was only for state-owned parks.

Senator Rosenwald asked whether the park pass provided under the bill would cover parking fees at parks.

Senator Watters responded that parking is a separate issue and is not included. The park pass would cover park entry only, not parking fees.

Holly Stevens, NAMI NH

- Ms. Stevens expressed support for the bill and emphasized the scope of mental health need in New Hampshire. Approximately 1 in 5 adults in the state experience a depressive episode, affecting an estimated 200,000 adults.
- In 2021, approximately 71,000 adults in New Hampshire did not receive any care for their mental health condition, highlighting significant gaps in access to treatment and supportive services.
- Research demonstrates that outdoor and nature-based activities improve mental health outcomes across all populations and age groups, including reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as improvements in overall well-being.

- She explained that the state's 10 community mental health centers serve a large number of individuals, the majority of whom receive services through Medicaid. This program would allow those centers to obtain park passes for their clients, creating an additional, low-cost therapeutic resource that enables individuals to access and benefit from outdoor experiences as part of their mental health care.

JS
Date Hearing Report completed: January 23, 2026