

Senate Finance Committee

Deb Martone 271-4980

SB 604-FN-A, making an appropriation to the university system of New Hampshire.

Hearing Date: February 3, 2026

Time Opened: 1:56 p.m.

Time Closed: 2:02 p.m.

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

Members of the Committee Absent: Senators Carson and Birdsell

Bill Analysis: This bill makes an appropriation to the university system and community college systems of New Hampshire.

Sponsors:

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Sen. Fenton

Sen. Rosenwald

Sen. Watters

Sen. Innis

Sen. Altschiller

Rep. Selig

Rep. Damon

Who supports the bill: See Senate Finance Committee Legislative Aide, Deb Martone, for complete listing of individuals in support of SB 604-FN-A.

Who opposes the bill: Julie Smith; Curtis Howland; Leo Plante; Russell Hodgkins; Rosina Lis; Arnold Scott; Timothy Lis; Bradley Louth; Daniel Richardson; Laura Vincent; Jesse Medeiros; Mary Lannon; Pamela Harders; Letitia Ufford;

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Perkins Kwoka, Prime Sponsor:

- SB 604-FN-A is a straightforward measure to restore the funding which was cut in last year's budget for the University System and for the Community College System.
- Funding cuts in recent years have totaled \$35 million. The impact to the students has been measurable.
- New Hampshire already has the most expensive state college for in-state students, which is likely to increase further due to these cuts.
- These policies have acted to the detriment of our young, working Granite Staters.
- As a result of these cuts, the Community College System has also been forced to increase tuition.

- For many, especially those in the North Country, our community colleges are the most economic and efficient means of obtaining better employment and producing a stronger workforce for the trades and for healthcare services.
- This bill simply restores the \$14 million and \$3.5 million in funding cuts for the USNH and Community College Systems, respectfully. These are sound investments in our workforce development.
- Affordability for our youngest constituents will pay dividends into the future with a more educated workforce for our many small businesses and industries.
- Senator Perkins Kwoka asked for the committee's support in restoring these funds so that we may enhance educational opportunities for our young Granite Staters.
- Senator Watters inquired if it would be fair to say that this appropriation for the Community College System of New Hampshire would immediately impact and increase the number of folks who would attend the Community College System. Senator Perkins Kwoka acknowledged tuition is one of the main barriers for many students. Being able to provide these funds and ensuring we're keeping college affordable is a real economic opportunity pathway. Senator Watters then asked isn't this particularly timely because states around us are offering reduced or free community college tuition, especially in the border areas and elsewhere. It's very difficult for us to see the 20 percent to 30 percent increase in community college system enrollments we've seen in rural Iowa, Massachusetts, and Maine. Senator Perkins Kwoka agreed. We're in competition for workforce for our businesses here in New Hampshire. It's our job to do what we can to ensure the workforce is there and our economy can continue to grow.

Catherine Provencher, Chancellor, University System of New Hampshire:

- The University System certainly supports SB 604-FN-A, and thanks the sponsors for seeing the value in the University System and all that it provides to benefit our citizenry.
- This is really about workforce and pipeline. The competition across New England is fierce. Our surrounding states are doubling down on investment not just in the Community College System but with more scholarships to keep their students in state. And not only keep their students in state, but take our students as well. The University of Maine has offered in-state tuition to any student in New England, New York and maybe even New Jersey. The University of Massachusetts at Lowell also offers in-state tuition for any student who lives in a 50-mile radius. A 50-mile radius includes the population centers of New Hampshire.
- We're all competing for regional workforce. Restoring funding for the University System would have an immediate impact on keeping New Hampshire students in New Hampshire.
- A restoration of funds could perhaps provide the ability for the University System to continue to freeze in-state tuition. USNH had a six-year freeze due to the support from the state.
- Many of our students are majoring in areas where New Hampshire's future needs lie.
- The reduction is adding to uncertainty with students and families. They have so many choices.

- Chancellor Provencher encouraged the committee to pass SB 604-FN-A.

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Date Hearing Report completed: February 4, 2026