

Senate Education Committee

Ryan Meleedy 271-4151

SB 59-FN, establishing a recruitment incentive program within the community college system for public safety communicators and dispatchers and making an appropriation therefor.

Hearing Date: January 21, 2025

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

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill expands the law enforcement, firefighter, and EMT recruitment and retention program in the community college system to include public safety communicators and dispatchers. The bill also establishes the police standards and training recruitment and retention fund, administered by the police standards and training council in support of the recruitment and retention program. The bill makes an appropriation to the police standards and training council for this purpose.

Sponsors:

Sen. Watters	Sen. Long	Sen. Rochefort
Sen. Lang	Sen. Avarad	Sen. Abbas
Sen. Prentiss	Sen. Gannon	Sen. Innis
Sen. Altschiller	Sen. Carson	Sen. McGough
Sen. Fenton	Sen. McConkey	Sen. Rosenwald
Sen. Perkins Kwoka	Rep. Roy	Rep. Rhodes
Rep. A. Murray	Rep. Meuse	

Who supports the bill: Senator David Watters (4), Senator David Rochefort (1), Senator Mark McConkey (3), Senator Donovan Fenton (10), Senator Cindy Rosenwald (13), Senator Debra Altschiller (24), Senator Suzanne Prentiss (5), Senator Daniel Innis (7), Senator Tim McGough (11), Berrio Simon, Steve Lavoie (Department of Safety), John Scippa (Police Standards and Training), Shannon Reid (Community College System of New Hampshire).

Who opposes the bill: No one signed in opposition to this bill.

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

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator David Watters:

- Senator David Watters presented Senate Bill 59, establishing that the bill would assist recruitment efforts for essential public service employees in New Hampshire by making changes to the current recruitment and retention program.

Senator Watters detailed the changes:

- Adding dispatchers to the list of essential public services that the program covers.
 - Reimbursement for non-credit degree programs. He elaborated that this applies to community college classes that members of the program might take that technically don't relate to their overall academic concentration or their employment as essential public service employees in their respective duties (Police, Fire, etc.).
 - Funding for necessary materials within the police academy (equipment, training materials, etc.) This covers any costs of partaking in the police academy, which was already supposed to be fully paid for by the original recruitment and retention program in its current form.
 - Adding dispatchers as members of the council that supervises this program in light of their new designation as an occupation covered under the program if the bill is passed.
 - Establishment of a fund for the 'extra costs' associated with the police academy (\$125,000 appropriation).
- Senator Watters briefly updated the committee on some of the program's successes so far and reiterated the program's intent.
 - Senator Ward asked about the length of the fire training program, to which Senator Watters explained it was eight weeks.

Steve Lavoie (Assistant Commissioner, Department of Safety)

- Mr. Lavoie testified in support of Senate Bill 59.
- Mr. Lavoie explained that dispatchers have experienced similar struggles with recruitment and retention to other first responder services that are covered under this program and that it was essential to add this profession to the program to meet the needs of telecommunicators/dispatchers.
- Senator Ward asked whether people who entered the community college recruitment and retention program would have to work a certain amount of time at their respective profession before they are to be reimbursed, to which Mr. Lavoie

replied that this is not the case, and that reimbursement was provided at the conclusion of their time in the program. He also added that firefighters are already partially supported by the department itself, which takes some of the burden off the state's reimbursement of the fire academy.

- Senator Abbas inquired about the number of vacancies in the dispatcher profession statewide. Mr. Lavoie did not have the statewide data to answer Senator Abbas' question entirely. However, he explained that internally, the Department of Safety's 911 dispatchers had ten vacancies out of fifty-seven full-time positions, five part-time vacancies out of eleven, ten full-time vacancies out of thirty for police dispatchers, and fifteen part-time vacancies out of thirty-four (overall around 20-30% of vacancies within the Department of Safety dispatchers).
- Senator Prentiss explained that her district experiences similar numbers of vacancies and understands it to be a statewide issue.
- Senator Prentiss asked about advanced program eligibility for EMTs and whether they were covered under this program, to which Mr. Lavoie responded that his interpretation was that it only applies to the fire academy, the police academy, and the Community College System (under the current version of the program, excluding the changes that the bill proposes).

John Scippa (NH Police Standards and Training):

- John Scippa testified in support of Senate Bill 59, explaining that most of the important details had been covered by Senator Watters and Mr. Lavoie.
- Mr. Scippa explained that funding inequities exist among the state's police departments. Therefore, some departments with lower funding have required recruits to pay for at least some of their training equipment for the police academy, which has a noticeable effect on recruitment numbers. He explained that with one of the changes made to this bill, this would become a nonissue for those police departments that currently do not reimburse their recruits for these expenses and could potentially lead to high recruitment numbers in those departments.

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