

Senate Education Committee

Trevor Currier 271-4151

SB 658-FN, authorizing the department of education to establish a safe and resilient schools advisory council.

Hearing Date: February 17, 2026

Time Opened: 9:58 a.m. **Time Closed:** 10:27 a.m.

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

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill authorizes the department of education to establish a safe and resilient schools advisory council to review existing resources and data and develop a safe and resilient schools framework.

Sponsors:

Sen. Watters

Sen. Rosenwald

Sen. Fenton

Sen. Long

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Who supports the bill: 45 People signed in support of SB 658-FN. To see the full list of sign-ins, please email the committee aide (trevor.currier@gc.nh.gov).

Who opposes the bill: 11 People signed in opposition to SB 658-FN. To see the full list of sign-ins, please email the committee aide (trevor.currier@gc.nh.gov).

Who is neutral on the bill: No one.

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator David Watters, *Senate District 4*

- Senator Watters introduced and testified in support of Senate Bill 658-FN
- Senator Watters stated that the purpose of the bill is to ensure schools are prepared to handle all crises, whether they involve acute student mental health issues or aim to increase awareness of best practices for teaching neurodivergent students.

- He explained that schools with safe and resilient programs produce improved behavioral health outcomes and instructional time.
- Senator Watters explained that the purpose of the council is to bring together experts in this field and explore ways to develop models for best practices.
- He stated that law enforcement is ready and willing to integrate their training and crisis response into the school setting. He highlighted the Dover Police Department's work in this area.
- He listed the various stakeholders identified in the legislation as participants.
- Senator Watters recommended adopting amendment 2026-0735s to include the New Hampshire Alliance for Public Charter Schools and the Director of the School Readiness Program.
- He stated that the council would review the data provided on school safety to ensure they are enhancing students' ability to learn. He added that the challenges facing schools have grown, and Senate Bill 658-FN presents an opportunity to address these issues, which districts are currently tackling on their own.
- He stated that the bill also created a fund for receiving grants.
- Senator Sullivan asked Senator Watters to consider adding “or designee” after the Commissioner of the Department of Education. Senator Watters replied that this is addressed on page 1, line 23, but he would be willing to add the language in the spot identified by Senator Sullivan.

Amy Rich Crane, *Reach for the Top Therapy*

- Ms. Crane testified in support of Senate Bill 658-FN.
- Ms. Crane explained that the risk that is being prevented is not a diagnosis to be treated but rather in isolation and system fragmentation.
- She stated that one in five New Hampshire students considers attempting suicide.
- Ms. Crane stated that the risk of suicide in neurodivergent youth is much higher than in the overall youth population due to their greater exposure to factors that predict suicide risk.
- She added that isolation and punishment are the most harmful things for a child thinking about self-harm. She added that students struggling to manage chronic stress are neurologically adapting to an environment that does not feel safe.

- She established that the strongest protective factor against suicide is connectedness and that when connectedness decreases, suicide risk increases.
- Ms. Crane explained the main warning signs of suicide risk in young people. She mentioned that educators spend a lot of time with children who might display these signs and, therefore, need proper training to identify them. She also emphasized that recognizing these signs early increases the chances of a positive outcome.
- She shared that the US Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center found that 100 percent of attackers involved in targeted school violence experienced significant social stressors.
- She explained that many schools cannot independently form a task force to review their educators' training but would greatly benefit from such a service at the state level.
- She stated that a state-level approach could help establish a common language, review and give feedback on the tiered response framework, and identify best practices for choosing communication channels.
- She stated that currently, forty-five New Hampshire children receiving care at her clinic are experiencing suicidal ideation.
- She emphasized that the bill seeks a collaborative approach to bring together the various stakeholders who have been working independently and separately in the field.

Ashleigh Moore-Hadley, *Reach for the Top Therapy*

- Ms. Moore-Hadley testified in support and explained that Senate Bill 658-FN is critical to the prevention of crises in children.
- Ms. Moore-Hadley read testimony on behalf of her colleague describing their personal experience and challenges for the Sandy Hook children and community after the 2012 tragedy.
- She stated that many students lost their sense of security after the Sandy Hook tragedy and deserved a stronger community to help them cope through difficult times.
- Ms. Moore-Hadley explained that children cannot learn, grow, and thrive in an environment where they don't feel safe. She added that safety is about more than locked doors and that the state must invest in long-term mental health services and preventive care.

- She emphasized that responses to crises should focus on connections rather than control. She stated that a collaborative approach among schools, families, mental health professionals, and law enforcement will lead to the best outcomes.
- She stressed the need for a proactive instead of a reactive approach.
- She added that it is our responsibility as citizens to provide for our children and ensure they can grow and succeed.

Sam Hawkins, NAMI – New Hampshire

- Mr. Hawkins testified in support of Senate Bill 658-FN
- Mr. Hawkins explained that many organizations across New Hampshire have been working tirelessly to address the mental health crisis in our state. He added that, in doing so, people have learned that these institutions work better together rather than separately.
- Mr. Hawkins explained that the school environment affects the challenges students face both inside and outside the classroom, and that this council would be very beneficial for many students.
- He stated that this council will result in improved mental health outcomes.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition: None.

Neutral Information Presented: None.

T.C.
Date Hearing Report completed: February 18, 2026