

Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

Jessica Bourque 271-2104

HB 158, relative to public inspection of absentee ballot lists.

Hearing Date: February 17, 2026

Time Opened: 9:15 a.m.

Time Closed: 9:26 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Gray, Lang, Rochefort, Perkins Kwoka and Long

Members of the Committee Absent: None

Bill Analysis: This bill requires that town and city clerks shall make absentee ballot voter lists available for public inspection, and requires the secretary of state to report on absentee ballots information.

Sponsors:

Rep. Hill

Rep. Bernardy

Rep. Sweeney

Rep. Verville

Rep. Berry

Rep. S. Boyd

Rep. T. Walsh

Rep. Sheehan

Sen. Pearl

Sen. Avard

Sen. McConkey

Who supports the bill: 4 people signed in support of this bill. For a full list of names, please contact the committee aide, Jessica Bourque, at jessica.bourque@gc.nh.gov

Who opposes the bill: 93 people signed in opposed to this bill. For a full list of names, please contact the committee aide, Jessica Bourque, at jessica.bourque@gc.nh.gov

Summary of testimony presented:

Rep. Greg Hill, Prime Sponsor, Merrimack – District 2

- There are two ways to look at Election Law bills: preventative and post-mortem. This is a post-mortem bill.
- This bill looks at where clerks send absentee ballots.
- Rep. Hill provided the committee with a packet of information from the Secretary of State's Office (SOS) that lists locations where different clerks sent ballots in the last election, broken down by in-state and out of state. This bill addresses cases where ballots were sent out of state.
- Some of the locations have been identified as universities. In fact, most are universities, but a few addresses are somewhat unusual.

- He pointed out some of the locations where ballots were mailed: Mammoth Lakes, California; Sarasota, Florida; Delray Beach, Florida; and Naples, Florida, and noted that all of these places had 4 ballots mailed, which he finds unusual.
- This bill would require the SOS to compile a list of the 20 main addresses to which ballots were sent within 60 days following an election.

Senator Long asked if, given the out-of-state addresses in the packet, we know whether they are homes, hotels, or something else.

Rep. Hill said that, based on the information we currently have, we don't know, and added that no absentee ballots were mailed to the Villages in Florida, which surprised him. He also finds it curious that the number 4 keeps recurring throughout the packet. It appears there may be a default that prevents the number from being less than 4.

Senator Gray asked why there isn't a fiscal note for this bill and mentioned that tracking voters and verifying those who present an ID will require additional manpower. He also asked if a voter list obtained from the SOS would contain the same information he is seeking and wondered if someone could do their own sorting of the data.

Rep. Hill explained that the answer to Senator Gray's first question is that this information is already maintained by the clerks and forwarded to the Secretary of State. The packets provided to the committee came from the SOS. Regarding the second question, he mentioned that an accurate report has not been produced because the information has not been compiled collectively; it has always been organized town-by-town. It was only after the SOS assembled the data into this packet that we knew which clerk sent ballots to particular addresses.

Senator Lang asked why we don't just have the SOS investigate the top 20 addresses rather than write a report.

Rep. Hill said he would be happy with that.

Senator Rochefort noted that the repeated occurrence of the number 4 is also curious to him. In trying to find fault with that, Senator Rochefort asked Rep. Hill whether he had examined the formula to ensure that there isn't an input error and that it doesn't default to 4.

Rep. Hill said that is an excellent suggestion. He knows that there was a default going less than 4. He would assume that most of these are either 1s or 2s. It is strange to him that they are all 4s unless they are being sent to a college or university.