

# Senate Executive Departments and Administration Committee

*Ben Mickens 271-1403*

**HB 392-FN**, directing the dissolution of the department of health and human services' office of health access and the department of environmental services' functions for environmental justice.

**Hearing Date:** February 18, 2026

**Time Opened:** 9:40 a.m.

**Time Closed:** 11:04 a.m.

**Members of the Committee Present:** Senators Pearl, McGough, Gannon, Altschiller and Reardon

**Members of the Committee Absent :** None

**Bill Analysis:** This bill directs the dissolution of the department of health and human services' office of health access and the department of environmental services' functions for environmental justice, and requires certain programs administered by the office of health access to be transferred to other divisions or offices.

---

**Sponsors:**

Rep. Belcher

Rep. Corcoran

Rep. Alexander Jr.

Rep. Turcotte

Rep. Sabourin dit

Rep. Terry

Choiniere

Rep. Warden

---

**Who supports the bill:** Representative Mike Belcher, Pamela Harders, Curtis Howland, James Gardner, Timothy Finney, Daniel Richardson, Jesse Medeiros, Thomas Kolling, Cory Stone, Blair Perot, Mary Powell, Juliet Perdichizzi, Max Ledoux, Robin Saba, Julie Smith, Olga Duclerc, Nathan Dwyer, Ryan Bloodworth, James Higginbottom.

**Who opposes the bill:** Representative Timothy Horrigan, Representative Lucy Weber, Ann Landry (DHHS), John Williams (DHHS), Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre (NHCDD), Deborah Schachter (NH Charitable Foundation), Vanessa Blais (NHCDD), Louis Esposito (ABLE NH), Henry Harris (International Institute New England), Clement Kigugu (Overcomers Refugee Services), Amy Moore (Ascentria Care Alliance), Laura Anna Turano (GNMH), Sam Hawkins (NAMI NH), Bianca Gentil (Waypoint), Heidi Trimarco (Conservation Law Foundation), Rebecca Woitjowski (New Futures),

MacKenzie Nicholson (Moms Rising), Dylan Hoey (NHAIR), Cathy Stratton (NH Medical Society), Kelley Osborne, Kathy Brunet and 292 others signed opposed online.

**Who is neutral on the bill:** No one.

**Summary of testimony presented in support:**

**Representative Mike Belcher**

- Rep. Belcher explained that the bill is an attempt to address and match executive orders from the Trump administration.
- Rep. Belcher stated that this bill seeks to dissolve the DHHS Office of Health Access due to past failures as well as address concerns about the DES functions for environmental justice, specifically that the authority is too wide and effectively serves as a veto.
- The representative explained that government offices can serve as a point of contact for NGO's which the representative believes may not necessarily work to the benefit of the public.

**Summary of testimony presented in opposition:**

**Representative Lucy Webber**

- The representative opposes this bill, and believes it is unnecessary.
- Rep. Weber explained that this office is important for those who need assistance to access healthcare and that the need for this office will not go away if the office is abolished.
- Rep. Weber stated that access to preventative medicine and early ongoing treatment save huge amounts of dollars down the line. It is also better for the health of people.
- Rep. Weber believes that the DES concerns have been resolved.

**Representative Tim Horrigan**

- Rep. Horrigan explained how he argued last year during the budget process to stop the renaming of the office now being offered for elimination.
- Rep. Horrigan stated that he believes the office does their work, and they do it well. Particularly in their work with refugee populations.
- The representative urges the committee to vote down the legislation.

**Ann Landry, (Associate Commissioner, DHHS)**

- DHHS is opposed to HB 392-FN.
- Assoc. Comm. Landry explained that the Office of Health Access is the way by which many across New Hampshire are able to get their healthcare.
- Assoc. Comm. Landry explained that the bill will disperse the Office of Health Access across the department which would greatly diminish effectiveness and cause disruptions for those who utilize the services.

- There is also the refugee resettlement program, which is part of DHHS. Moving this out of the Office of Health Access would make it more difficult to have an effective management of the program.

**Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre, (Executive Director, NH CDD)**

- Ms. Rodriguez-Legendre stated that she works to help facilitate meeting the needs of those with Developmental Disabilities across the state and frequently works with the Office of Health Access.
- Ms. Rodriguez-Legendre explained that it is crucial that there is a single point of contact to coordinate help.
- Ms. Rodriguez-Legendre also expressed concerns about increasing inefficiency by potentially duplicating services and work done.
- Ms. Rodriguez-Legendre noted that the Governor's COGE report states that centralized services in DHHS is actually more efficient not less.

**Sen. Altschiller** asked about the potential loss of federal funds.

**Ms. Rodriguez** answers that this could result in losing oversight on federal grant applications and dollars coming in adding that it is impossible to tell how much money would be lost in the disruption to the process by outsourcing.

**Henry Harris, (Managing Director, International Institute of New England)**

- Mr. Harris explained that all his clients are here legally through federal programs and they work hard to become members of the community.
- Mr. Harris stated that was unclear to me why this bill was being presented and that this office is crucial for attracting federal dollars into the state to support programs.
- Mr. Harris stated that in his experience the Office of Health Access has been helpful. Others in his industry in other states wish they had the same kind of relationship with their state offices.
- Mr. Harris believes this bill creates more bureaucracy, not less.

**Senator Pearl** asked if that Mr. Harris' office will still need the same services received now and would just have to go through multiple different offices to get the same services.

**Mr. Harris** confirmed.

**Amy Moore (VP of External Affairs, Ascentria Care Alliance)**

- Ms. Moore states that she works with the Office of Health Access regularly and finds that they are responsive and do good work.
- Ms. Moore explains that the reason people can come be here to listen and testify is partly due to this office and the support they give.

**Kathy Brunet**

- Ms. Brunet disagrees with assertions that divisive ideology is the origin of this office.
- Ms. Brunet believes the Office of Health Access is focused on people trying to rebuild their lives and helps legal residents seek basic services.

**Clement Kigugu (Executive Director, Overcomers Refugee Services)**

- Mr. Kigugu explained that he came to America as a refugee in 2006 and is now a US citizen and have lived in Concord for 19 years.
- Mr. Kigugu explained that refugees do not leave countries because they want to, they flee due to war, persecution, or other disasters.
- Mr. Kigugu stated that the work to support refugees needs assistance from DHHS and eliminating this office will create confusion.

**Sam Hawkins, (Public Policy Assistant, NAMI NH)**

- Mr. Hawkins believes this bill would jeopardize the progress made in New Hampshire over the last few years. He stated that there is a lot of work still in progress that will be disrupted by the elimination of this office.
- Mr. Hawkins expressed concern about the impact of splintering this office across DHHS.

**Deborah Schachter, (Director of Public Policy NH Charitable Foundation)**

- Ms. Schachter echoed concerns about the diffusion of responsibility across state offices and the bills silence on the need to focus on access to mental and behavioral health.

**Laura Turano, (Greater Nashua Mental Health)**

- Ms. Turano explained that she is a deaf therapist working on the deaf therapy team.
- Ms. Turano explained how she works across the state with the blind and deaf. There are significant barriers for many people and the impact of losing this office could be major for citizens across New Hampshire.
- Ms. Turano further explained how Office of Health Access also helps local governments meet the needs of these residents, not just state programs.

**Heidi Trimarco, (Senior Attorney, Conservation Law Foundation)**

- Ms. Trimarco stated her opposition to the bill, specifically regarding the environmental justice provision which would not result in any meaningful change.
- Ms. Trimarco explained that environmental justice as a body of law recognizes that certain groups carry the weight of environmental issues disproportionately and believes it is not a veto system.

**Rebecca Woitkowski, (VP Policy, New Futures)**

- Ms. Woitkowski believes that the Office of Health Access has been a huge help to many people and eliminating the office would be a major disruption.

**MacKenzie Nicholson, (State Director, Moms Rising)**

- Ms. Nicholson expressed concerns that the bill makes a previously unified approach into a fractal one and believes access works best when there is one point of contact and not many different ones.
- Ms. Nicholson explained that moms may need access to more than one service, without people to help coordinate they are less likely to receive this care.
- Ms. Nicholson expressed her belief that without offices like the Office for Health Access, gaps widen and that access should not depend on persistence.

**Senator Altschiller** asked about the impact of this potential diffusion of services across the agency, and specifically if this is setting up these programs to fail.

**Ms. Nicholson** agreed and stated that the experience of mothers on the receiving end is very frustrating already and the added bureaucracy could lead to less use of these programs.

**Dylan Hoey, (Director, NHAIR)**

- Mr. Hoey stated his belief that health equity transcends partisan politics.
- Mr. Hoey highlighted that nearly every state across the US maintains an office like this and that Republican and Democrat governors across the country have established and maintained offices like this.
- Mr. Hoey further stated that he believes this would send the wrong message to refugees.

**Kelly Osborne**

- Ms. Osborne explained that there are major fiscal concerns tied to this bill, potentially up to \$90 million of federal dollars at risk because of this bill.
- Ms. Osborne explained that, while there may be some savings from eliminating positions, she believes the savings are minimal compared to the huge risk of losing millions in federal funding as well as potential for increased litigation and administration costs.
- Ms. Osborne underlined that out of 10 regional community health centers, only 1 has services for the deaf community.

**Cathy Stratton, (CEO, NH Medical Society)**

- Ms. Stratton stated that this will greatly increase barriers for vulnerable communities.

**Neutral Information Presented:** None.