

Senate Finance Committee

Deb Martone 271-4980

HB 704-FN-A, making an appropriation to the retired senior volunteer program.

Hearing Date: February 17, 2026

Time Opened: 1:23 p.m.

Time Closed: 1:42 p.m.

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

Members of the Committee Absent: Senator Carson

Bill Analysis: This bill makes a contingent appropriation to the department of health and human services for the purpose of funding the retired senior volunteer program.

Sponsors:

Rep. Wallner

Rep. W. MacDonald

Rep. Nagel

Rep. McMahon

Rep. Proulx

Sen. Rochefort

Sen. Watters

Sen. Avard

Sen. McGough

Who supports the bill: Please see Senate Finance Committee Legislative Aide, Deb Martone, for a complete listing of individuals in support of HB 704-FN-A.

Who is neutral on the bill: Brian Clark

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Representative Mary Jane Wallner, Prime Sponsor:

- RSVP is a retired senior volunteer program. The appropriation of \$180,000 in HB 704-FN-A will be equally divided between 4 programs in the state.
- This appropriation is contingent upon revenues being greater than plan at the end of this year.
- One of the goals of RSVP is to help seniors remain in their own homes by providing home visits to isolated seniors. The RSVP volunteers provide rides for older adults to medical appointments, and assist with errands and grocery shopping. All of these things allow people to stay at home and delay higher cost care.
- This funding will be used to expand the driver program with volunteer recruitment and offering mileage reimbursement. This would allow programs to recruit volunteer drivers who cannot presently afford to donate gas to drive people to medical appointments.

- In addition, these funds would allow RSVPs to offer additional bone-building classes. The funding would help cover staff time and the cost of weights for the additional classes.
- Two of the programs offer "fix it" programs whereby volunteers provide small home repairs.
- Senior volunteer programs benefit everyone and are essential to our state's long-term services and support system. This program taps into the skills, experience, and wisdom of older adults, mobilizing them as vital community assets.
- Senator Gray inquired about the source of the funding. Representative Wallner explained they would be General Fund dollars. Senator Gray continued given the budgetary actions taken with the \$50 million back-of-the-budget cut for the Department of Health and Human Services, he thought they agreed to allow for surplus funds to be used first to backfill those back-of-the-budget cuts. Representative Wallner surmised Senator Gray was probably correct.

Nancy McKeon, Executive Director, Friends Program:

- This nonprofit has been around for 50 years. They've been running the RSVP for more than two decades.
- Although there is a federal grant, they are required to raise funds locally to match the federal grant.
- The RSVP is one of several AmeriCorps National Service programs that are targeted at senior volunteers, 55+.
- They are one of four programs in the state, and serve Merrimack and Rockingham Counties, as well as parts of Strafford and Belknap Counties. The program provides more than 300 volunteers. Last year they served more than 30,000 hours in their communities.
- They have folks who provide services such dropping groceries off at somebody's door. They also have companionship programs, and recruit, train and certify volunteer leaders that offer twice weekly classes. There are more than 100 free classes a year at 30 different locations for just their agency alone. Those classes have a capacity of up to 25 people. They are safe and social, run to a high standard, and ensure seniors are not sitting at home if they can't afford a gym membership.
- Medical transportation and fix it programs are services that seniors need to enable them to stay in their homes.
- New Hampshire is one of the fastest aging states in the nation. There are many New Hampshire residents who are leaving the workforce with skills and talents to give. RSVP keeps those skills and talents in communities, improving the lives of New Hampshire residents.
- They also run blood drives and food pantries. They provide backpacks full of food that get dropped off at school districts for food-insecure kids to take home with them. The number of services they can provide is endless.
- Their job is to find these volunteers, find out what they're good at, and then match them up with a local nonprofit or a public agency that can put those skills to work. That's what these programs do.
- With these funds they would recruit and train more volunteers, and certify them to teach more classes, These funds would provide mileage to seniors who want to

volunteer but don't have the budget to pay for gas to enable them to drive others to medical appointments.

- Volunteers live longer. Their health outcomes are better. They want to stay engaged.

Lily Wellington, Executive Director, State Commission on Aging:

- A recent study was done in October of 2025 that looked at 17 different indicators for healthy aging. Of those 17 indicators, volunteer matching programs scored the highest in terms of both impact and return on investment. It was something like an ROI of 24. If you were looking at \$180,000 and the return on investment was 24 times that, that is quite a good investment for the state.
- When we think about this program's impacts, it's more than just the individual receiving the services. It is also the older adult who is providing them. It is a dual benefit.
- This has a tremendous impact on our system of care. It is an effective strategy to utilize the wisdom and the talents of individuals who themselves are retired.
- HB 704-FN was intentionally written so that it is not funded unless revenues are better than projected.

Judith Jones:

- This bill helps rebalance the system and infuses funds in community-based care, which we know lowers the cost of long-term care.
- Investing in community services will reduce nursing home placements. Letting people stay in their community is what they want. This bill helps to do that and it's cost-effective.
- What dollar value are the volunteers giving the state? That is approximately \$35 an hour, a true cost benefit.
- These programs come with well established infrastructures. The programs are in place. They're ready to work and they're ready for volunteers.
- Regarding the rate of return on these programs, one study says you get \$11 back for every \$1 invested. Another more recent study has that as high as \$17 back.
- Socialization is a big benefit of these programs, both for the recipient and the volunteer.
- Senator Rosenwald asked in terms of people staying out of nursing homes, since the counties pay for more than half the cost of nursing home care, could we look at this bill as relieving the burden on property taxes. Ms. Jones explained when we look at landmark legislation called the system of care for healthy aging passed in 2023, it really worked towards exactly that. Can we promote home and community-based care, and look at what that does to taxpayers? What you've seen over time is New Hampshire has made progress. That is really heartening. A program like this with a modest amount of money does so much good. It is such common sense when you're receiving free labor. You have dedicated people in this state giving of their time.

Roger Desrosiers, AARP New Hampshire:

- Mr. Desrosiers is a caregiving volunteer. He understands how these programs help older adults stay in their homes and communities.

- Whether it's a ride to a doctor's appointment, a delivered meal, or a friendly visit, these services make it possible for people to remain independent right where they want to be.
- Supporting RSVP doesn't just improve quality of life. It reduces long-term costs. Helping someone stay safely at home is far less expensive than nursing home care, and eases the strain on families and caregivers.
- HB 704-FN-A strengthens a program that is already making a real difference in the lives of older Granite Staters.

Neutral Information Presented:

Brian Clark, General Counsel, DHHS Bureau of Adult and Aging Services:

- HB 704-FN-A would make a contingent appropriation for retired senior volunteer programs which are federally funded programs. The Department would make an additional grant to those existing programs so that they can provide more services connecting seniors to volunteer opportunities in their community.
- Senator Rosenwald reiterated Representative Wallner's testimony that the bill would enable more people to stay home. She wondered if that meant it might keep people off the Medicaid long-term care waiver longer. Atty. Clark replied it seems possible, but he couldn't say for sure.

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Date Hearing Report completed: February 21, 2026