

# Senate Education Committee

*Ryan Meleedy 271-4151*

**HB 208-FN**, relative to certification requirements for school nurses.

**Hearing Date:** March 18, 2025

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

**Members of the Committee Absent :** Senators Sullivan and Prentiss

**Bill Analysis:** This bill allows a superintendent and school board to nominate and appoint a school nurse, who must be licensed and registered with the board of nursing.

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**Sponsors:**

Rep. Edwards

Rep. Peternel

Rep. Seidel

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**Who supports the bill:** Allison Jones, Kimberlee Braught, Patricia Anglin, Jennifer Wyman, Beth-Ann Flanders, Jane Trombi, Christie Cipolla, Janine Kerouac, Curtis Howland, Sarah McCarthy, Tammi Loiselle, Michael Martioski, Mary Ann Skersey, Carol Petruszewicz.

**Who opposes the bill:** Sarah Lynn Williams, Jennifer Wilson-Tucker, E Goyette, Mary Behnke, Katherine Lajoie, Carole Boutin, Polly Campion, Sally Patton, Sharon Sughrue, Gibran Mancus, Susan Moore, Carlene Ferrier, Joline Manseau, Shaun Thomas (NH Nurses' Association), Pam DiNapoli (NH School Nurses' Association).

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

**Summary of testimony presented in support:**

**Representative Kuttab - On behalf of Representative Edwards**

- Representative Kuttab introduced the bill on behalf of Representative Edwards.

**Summary of testimony presented in opposition:**

**Pam DiNapoli – New Hampshire School Nurses' Association**

- Ms. DiNapoli explained that the New Hampshire Board of Nursing has a criteria for what is considered a legitimate school nurse, and proceeded to provide the committee with the Board's full definition.
- Ms. DiNapoli explained that there was a minimum standard to practice that school nurses are required to meet in order to be eligible to be a school nurse.

She explained that the minimum standard was developed to address rising health concerns in schools.

- Ms. DiNapoli explained a detailed history of the regulations behind the school nurse occupation in the State of New Hampshire, detailing the process of how the current pathways for someone to become a school nurse came to be through rulemaking.
- She explained that, in its current structure, there are three pathways to school nurse certification.
- She explained that in 2019, the school nurse coordinator left the position, and there were uncertainties as to how the preexisting rules should be implemented. Ms. DiNapoli said that in 2019, the RSA was amended to permanently instate an official school nurse coordinator position, but that position has still never been filled since the last coordinator vacated the position.
- Ms. DiNapoli explained that the RSA was amended in 2023 to allow for people with an associate's degree in nursing (ADN) to be hired rather than only people with a bachelor's degree in nursing (BSN) based on a perceived shortage of school nurses. If an ADN is hired, they are required to partake in a three-step process towards certification.
- She explained that her organization was against this amendment of the RSA but eventually established that it was acceptable as long as the hired ADNs were working toward a bachelor's degree.
- She explained that Representative Edwards approached her organization this year to help craft legislation that would lessen the hiring requirements for school nurses because school administrators were having trouble finding pediatric nurses.
- She explained that she was in favor of the original language of this bill, which would have established that non-pediatric nurses would be eligible for school nurse certification. However, the language was repealed by the house education committee, and the bill was no longer one that Ms. DiNapoli or the NH School Nurses Association could support.
- She explained that most other states have more stringent requirements for who can become a certified school nurse.
- She established that certification benefited the health and wellness of students, and that virtually all incumbent school nurses are in favor of certification
- Ms. DiNapoli brought attention to the fact that despite opening the school nurse position to ADNs, there is still a shortage of school nurses in the state, and seven full-time vacancies still remain. She didn't believe that some of the past proposed measures to help fix this issue have been adequate, and she believed that stripping the certification requirement would be no different.

- She expressed her opinion that the current perceived school nurse shortage is more rooted in special education 1-to-1 nursing for children with IEPs and 504 plans. She explained that these aren't actually certified school nurses, but rather acute care nurses.
- Ms. DiNapoli explained that the real underlying issue is likely the hourly wage offered for various school nursing positions throughout the state. She said that Manchester could easily fill a number of vacancies because they offered a competitive agency salary, whereas other areas fail to offer such wages.
- She detailed the complexity of the school nurse profession compared to other nursing roles, explaining that it is one of the most challenging nursing disciplines.
- Senator Abbas clarified that Ms. DiNapoli was in favor of the original language in the bill as introduced, as opposed to the bill's current form.
- Senator Abbas questioned whether having any nurse at all is better than having no nurse to fill the vacancy. Ms. DiNapoli disagreed and said that it would be wrong to force parents to entrust their children's health to someone who might not know what they are doing due to a lack of training or certification. She established that there needs to be an emphasis on school nurse substitutes and salary increases and expressed that getting rid of certification is a solution looking for a problem to address.
- Senator Altschiller inquired about the list of day-to-day responsibilities that school nurses face and how specific training is necessary to handle these things. Ms. DiNapoli detailed the varying responsibilities facing school nurses, such as managing students' diabetes, food allergies, asthma, epilepsy, and a range of other somewhat common conditions and illnesses. She also explained that there is great nuance to the job, as sometimes children will embellish something like a stomachache in light of significant underlying mental health issues. She explained that identifying things like this takes substantial specialized training. She added that mental health issues have become one of the biggest challenges that school nurses face.
- Senator Ward asked how much pediatric experience someone would need to have if they were to be hired as a school nurse. Ms. DiNapoli explained that the minimum amount of experience needed was three years. She explained that an issue with the pediatric experience requirement is that the only places you can get it in the state are Dartmouth or the Elliot Hospital. She explained that if an ADN enters as a 'Year One,' they need a mentor for training purposes.

## **Lori Collins – Principal, Auburn Village School**

- Ms. Collins explained that she was the one who came forward with the idea for the bill to Representative Edwards because she was having difficulty hiring a full-time school nurse who met all of the requirements at her school.
- She clarified that despite her initial support of the bill, she agreed with Pam DiNapoli's opinion of it in its current amended form.
- Ms. Collins detailed her experience attempting to hire people to be a school nurse in her own school, and the administrative barriers and rules that made this process strenuous.
- She explained that the current job market makes hiring someone with pediatric experience almost impossible and that it might be best for the legislature to review the credential aspects of school nurse hiring.
- Senator Abbas asked if Ms. Collins supported the original draft, or the current version. She expressed opposition to all forms, adding that she didn't have much time to read through the drafts extensively due to the busy nature of her job.
- Ms. Collins explained that she attempted to hire a paramedic over the summer, but the credentialing department barred her from hiring the paramedic because of a lack of pediatric experience. She explained that this was the only applicant for the school nurse position and that when there isn't a dedicated school nurse, she, as the principal, is responsible for most of the duties that would normally be assigned to a nurse.
- Senator Altschiller asked if that same paramedic were to begin pediatric training, would they be eligible to be hired. Ms. Collins explained that they would still not be eligible.
- Ms. DiNapoli clarified that under Representative Edwards's original bill language, credentialing would be opened to people with a certain degree of nursing experience but not necessarily pediatric experience. They must be educated as nurses, however.

## **Shaun Thomas – New Hampshire Nurses' Association**

- Mr. Thomas explained that the bill in its current amended form was completely distinct from the original bill's intent.
- He established that Representative Edwards was merely trying to make the hiring process more flexible while still maintaining the integrity of the school nurse position.
- He offered the association's help in crafting better legislation to achieve the goals that the original bill set out to accomplish.