

Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

Jessica Bourque 271-2104

HB 475-LOCAL, relative to the reductions from the default budget for official ballot town meetings.

Hearing Date: May 13, 2025

Time Opened: 9:46 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:01 a.m.

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

Members of the Committee Absent: Senator Lang

Bill Analysis: This bill alters the definition of default budget to include salary and benefit reductions which occur as a result of position turnover.

Sponsors:

Rep. Dunn

Rep. Alexander Jr.

Rep. Ankarberg

Rep. Aures

Rep. Perez

Rep. Colcombe

Rep. DeRoy

Rep. Pauer

Rep. Harvey-Bolia

Rep. Wood

Who supports the bill: Rep. Diane Pauer, Rep. Bob Wherry, Rep. Kristine Perez, Rep. Juliet Harvey-Bolia, Aubrey Freedman

Who opposes the bill: Barrett Christina, Brian Hawkins, Brodie Deshaies

Summary of testimony presented:

Representative Christine Perez, on behalf of the prime sponsor.

- This is a House priority bill.
- Under current law, when a school department has unfilled positions, those salaries remain in the default budget, sometimes for multiple years. Allowing funds to be reallocated and used somewhere else.
- This bill would remove those salaries after one year.
- This will help voters understand what they are voting for.
- If a school district uses the open position money for something else, that amount is deducted because that money wasn't allocated.

Barrett Christina, NH School Board Association

- The NH School Board Association is opposed to this bill.
- The biggest concern is lines 8, 9, and 10. The portion of the bill that addresses salaries and benefits that were vacant before the previous year's budget was approved and have remained vacant.
- School districts are facing significant staff shortages, particularly for support staff, including paraprofessionals. Every school district constantly has open paraprofessional positions.
- Someone in the business office would need to find out which positions were filled before the budget was approved and which were filled after the budget was approved.
- The primary purpose of the default budget was not to reduce the operating budget but to provide voters with a second option if the voters voted down the proposed operating budget.

Senator Perkins Kwoka inquired whether this poses a danger due to the potential elimination of necessary positions.

- Yes, schools are already short-staffed; this wouldn't be practical.

Senator Long inquired about hiring paraprofessionals instead of special educators and said Manchester has been doing that recently. How would this bill work in that instance? Would that eliminate the vacant position?

- Mr. Christina said he hadn't considered that, but it lends to the conversation that this is convoluted.

Senator Gray stated that he interprets this as an attempt to fill the open positions and does not view the bill as restrictive.

- If an elementary school that provides grades K-6 needs 10 paraprofessionals but hires only seven, then when they eventually reach 10 hires, 2 leave for various reasons. This number is always changing.

Aubrey Freedman, Bridgewater

- Supports this bill.
- Default budgets never seem to go down.
- The existing law permits school districts to boost their budgets with positions that might be filled later. This creates an issue as it allows local officials to shift funds, which disrespects taxpayers.
- In a real fiscal emergency, officials can call an emergency meeting to authorize additional appropriations.

Senator Long inquired about the possibility of calling a special meeting regarding a special education student and whether that student would be identified.

- Mr. Freedman stated that identifying the student's name is unnecessary.

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Date Hearing Report completed: May 14, 2025