

**Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee**  
*Jessica Bourque 271-2104*

**HB 228-LOCAL**, relative to petitioned articles at annual or special town meetings.

**Hearing Date:** May 13, 2025

**Time Opened:** 9:16 a.m.

**Time Closed:** 9:32 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 authorizes written applications for a petitioned article at an annual or special town or school board meeting to identify a primary petitioner who shall be granted the same amount of time to introduce a petitioned article as is granted to the governing body or budget committee to introduce their warrant articles.

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**Sponsors:**

Rep. Pauer

Rep. Burroughs

Rep. Colcombe

Rep. Harvey-Bolia

Rep. W. MacDonald

Rep. Sellers

Rep. Veilleux

Rep. Creighton

Sen. Avard

Sen. McGough

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**Who supports the bill:** Rep. Diane Pauer, Rep. Bob Wherry

**Who opposes the bill:** Barrett Christina, Brodie Deshaies

**Summary of testimony presented:**

**Representative Diane Pauer, Prime Sponsor, Hillsborough-Dist. 36**

- This is a bipartisan bill.
- This bill attempts to address issues she has encountered with petitioned warrant articles over the years.
- Petitioners are not treated fairly, and respect in meetings and debates is often lacking. They face severe limitations in discussions, and articles frequently go unvoted. Many times, there is hostility towards petitioners.
- Recently, a school board coordinated with a moderator ahead of the meeting to develop rules that restricted the time and opportunity for the petitioner to present their warrant article at the meeting.

- This bill addresses these issues by designating a primary petitioner.
- The bill also allows the primary petitioner to address the petitioned warrant article by granting them the same amount of time as the governing body.
- All meetings belong to the voters as well as the governing body; this bill aims to level the playing field.

Senator Rochefort asked about section 4 and how this would have helped the situation she described.

- This allows a petitioner the time and opportunity to speak at the meeting.

**Barrett Christina, NH School Board Association (NHSBA)**

- The NH School Board Association is opposed to this bill.
- Lines 24-28 on page 2 state, “The primary petitioner shall be given the same amount of time equal to the longest amount of time granted to the governing body or budget committee to introduce any warrant article at the meeting.” This raises a concern since it may allow the petitioner to speak indefinitely about any warrant article, rather than being limited to the specific petitioned article they present.
- There are no other specific issues with the bill; they believe the moderator should have the flexibility to conduct the meeting as they see fit.
- The voters can override the moderator if they wish to hear what the petitioner has to say.

Senator Gray asked if Mr. Christina is suggesting that, if an amendment limiting testimony to the petitioned article and to 10 minutes or less were introduced, the NHSBA would support the bill.

- It would be more reasonable than how it is written now.

Senator Perkins Kwoka asked if Mr. Christina had any changes to lines 25 and 26 that would be acceptable.

- It would be acceptable if the wording were changed to reflect that the primary petitioner is allowed to speak to that specific petitioned article, rather than to just any article.

**Brodie Deshaies, NH Municipal Association (NHMA)**

- There appears to be a movement in the legislature this year to treat warrant articles differently from petitioned warrant articles. NHMA believes the only difference between the two is how the article gets on the ballot.

- One of their concerns is how moderators would be able to enforce this. They would need a stopwatch to track the time taken to introduce the longest warrant article, ensuring that everyone has the same amount of time allotted to them. Some municipalities have 20, 30, or 40 articles, which could pose difficulties.
- The term “introduce” is very vague. When does an introduction end? Is it during questions? Or when the public is speaking? NHMA is concerned about not knowing when that cutoff would be. Some moderators may implement that standard differently.
- NHMA believes voters should have the right to overrule the moderator and permit a petitioner to speak longer.

Senator Gray asked whether a warrant article published by the town is, in effect, treated the same as one put forth by a primary petitioner and asked how they differ.

- They don’t differ; ultimately, they are both articles that are presented to the legislative body for them to support or not to support.

Senator Gray asked if the town article has a time limit.

- It depends on the rules that were adopted for the town meeting.
- Ultimately, everyone operates under the same rules.

Senator Gray asked if the NHMA would still object to the bill if an amendment stated the petitioner should have “not less than 10 minutes” to introduce an article.

- Ultimately, NHMA believes the legislative body should be the one that determines that at each town meeting.

Senator Gray asked if Mr. Deshaies knows of cases in which a governing body has not had the opportunity to take as long as it wants to introduce an article.

- A recent case involved a school board where the superintendent wasn’t allowed to speak.
- The legislative body has the authority to decide how long someone may speak.