

Senate Judiciary Committee

Pete Mulvey 271-4063

HB 397, establishing a multi-agency task force chaired by the department of safety.

Hearing Date: May 13, 2025

Time Opened: 1:47 p.m.

Time Closed: 2:07 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Gannon, McConkey and Reardon

Members of the Committee Absent : Senators Abbas and Altschiller

Bill Analysis: This bill establishes a multi-agency task force to identify solutions to increase law enforcement presence and patrols on New Hampshire waterways.

Sponsors:

Rep. Darby

Rep. Rung

Rep. J. MacDonald

Sen. Watters

Who supports the bill: 118 individuals supported HB 397. Contact peter.mulvey@gc.nh.gov for further details.

Who opposes the bill: Three individuals opposed HB 397. Contact peter.mulvey@gc.nh.gov for further details.

Who is neutral on the bill: One individual was neutral toward HB 397. Contact peter.mulvey@gc.nh.gov for further details.

Summary of testimony:

Representative Will Darby

Hillsborough – District 11

- Rep. Darby maintained that individuals were more responsible when law enforcement was present.
- An increased presence of marine patrol would minimize conflict on water bodies.
- Rep. Darby described his observation of a decreased marine patrol presence on local water bodies which has coincided with increasingly reckless behavior in addition to unregistered craft.
- Rep. Darby emphasized that funds were not the reason behind the lack of personnel.
- The Department of Safety had been consulted on HB 397; The bill was initially a study committee. A task force was suggested by the Deputy Commissioner as the meetings would be

public, open to comment, and the goal would be to propose legislation to increase law enforcement patrols on water bodies.

- The lack of marine patrol was frequently cited by the NH Lakes Association.
- The multi agency task force is meant to determine multidisciplinary approaches to increase patrols on lakes.
- A variety of agencies have jurisdiction over water bodies. Fish and Game has the authority to enforce laws related to boats and motor vehicles, and the Department of Environmental Services has the lakes management and protection program. These agencies would be included in the task force.
- The Task force will engage stakeholders, experts, and law enforcement.
- There are federal dollars left on the table to support marine patrol that are underutilized because the State cannot fill the positions.
- The intent of the bill is to provide recommendations to address insufficient marine patrols and patrols in general, so residents and tourists may fully enjoy the State's treasured lakes.
- Sen. Gannon said that marine patrol spent significant time at his pond.
- Sen. Altschiller asked if the task force would consider expanding the volunteer lake ambassador program.
 - Rep. Darby said that the task force was more concerned with patrols themselves rather than those programs. Rep. Darby added that the task force could ensure greater compliance with registrations which will furnish funds to the programs specified by Senator Altschiller.

Tim Dunleavy

NH Marine Patrol – New Hampshire Department of Safety

- Marine patrol and Mr. Dunleavy did not have a position on the bill.
- Sen. Gannon asked if Officer Brook Trout was still with marine patrol.
 - Mr. Dunleavy said that he was not.
- Sen. Gannon asked why marine patrol was always on his pond and not others, and contemplated dispersement.
 - Mr. Dunleavy said the patrol force was often an officer residing in the area in question, and added that areas without residing officers were supplemented as best as possible.
- Historically, there were days in the agency where there were over 70-80 seasonal officers statewide.
- The agency was now down to about 20 officers alone.
- Sen. McConkey asked if it was true that funding wasn't the issue but rather just filling roles.
 - Mr. Dunleavy said the agency benefits from a dedicated fund, furnished by registrations and educational courses. They have a budget for 50-60 seasonal officers a year.
- Sen. McConkey asked Mr. Dunleavy how he believed the task force would help with filling roles.
 - Mr. Dunleavy believed that a task force may reveal which other agencies had the opportunity to supplement enforcement on local water bodies.
- Sen. Reardon asked if the positions were seasonal.
 - Mr. Dunleavy said that the bulk of the patrol officers were seasonal employees.
 - Mr. Dunleavy elaborated that there are nine full time positions within marine patrol.
 - Three to four of those roles play a significant role with homeland security's presence at the seacoast year-round. There are also recruiting and public relations roles.

- Sen. Reardon asked what months the seasonal folk worked and if the agency got the same people back every year.
 - Mr. Dunleavy said they were on the water maintaining buoys as soon as the ice melted right until the ice came back in.
 - Sometimes students and teachers worked for the agency.

Samantha Parkman

New Hampshire Lakes Association

- The Lakes Association supported the bill and increased water body patrols.

PM
Date Hearing Report completed: May 20, 2025