

Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

Jessica Bourque 271-2104

HB 274, relative to the verification of voter rolls annually.

Hearing Date: April 29, 2025

Time Opened: 10:16 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:32 a.m.

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

Members of the Committee Absent: None

Bill Analysis: This bill provides for the annual verification of voter rolls.

Sponsors:

Rep. Wherry

Rep. Burnham

Rep. Panek

Rep. Perez

Rep. Wood

Who supports the bill: Rep. Robert Wherry, Rep. Ross Berry

Who opposes the bill: Rep. Connie Lane, Sarah Burke Cohen

Summary of testimony presented:

Representative Robert Wherry, Prime Sponsor, Hillsborough-District 13

- In the previous term, he proposed a four-year verification cycle after conducting an extensive analysis to evaluate various election cycles and determine the most suitable one.
- Last year, nearly a thousand individuals in Hudson became ineligible for the voter rolls due to the 2021 purge. He examined the reasons behind this and also the benefits of conducting a purge annually.
- A significant number of people are moving in and out of NH, particularly in the southern area, which creates a need to update the voter rolls more regularly than the current ten-year cycle.
- The costs will decrease with more frequent verification.
- If you perform the verification more regularly, you have fewer letters to send more often.
- It will also save time on the workload if performed annually.

Representative Connie Lane, Merrimack-District 16

- Doesn't believe there is a need for an annual purge of the voter list.
- The clerks and the supervisors of the checklists have testified to the House that they are checking the voter lists twice a year against postal service records and death records.
- Most clerks in the state, particularly in the cities, do not wait ten years; they do it periodically.
- Believes this bill would create extra costs and take additional time for the clerks and the staff who are already overburdened, particularly in the smaller towns.
- Testimony in the House suggested that Democrats are against all verification timetables, which is untrue. Democrats would like to examine the voter lists on a four- to five-year timetable, with a look-back period encompassing two presidential cycles, because most people only vote in presidential elections. This would allow people to miss one presidential election without being purged. This could be accomplished by having the first verification done in 2029 and every 4 years after.
- The House also heard testimony that not all clerks are as diligent as others about sending out the thirty-day notice.
- Rep. Lane said she would be remiss if she did not point out that another way to do this would be for the state to join the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), which is used by about 25 states and performs seamlessly and for less cost.

Senator Perkins Kwoka asked if what she is saying is that this will burden our cities and towns that are already doing this work and noted that by not including two presidential elections, there could be individuals who registered to vote but may not have voted recently who might be surprised when they show up to vote to find they are no longer registered.

- Rep. Lane said, as she understands it, about a hundred people showed up during town elections who could not meet the citizenship requirement.
- It might take a couple of cycles for people to get used to the new citizenship requirement.
- Said it is not clear whether you will need to follow the new citizenship requirement if you are purged from the list when you go to reregister.

Senator Perkins Kwoka said one of her concerns is that the purging of the voter rolls and new requirements for voters may cause them to be turned away. Senator Perkin Kwoka then said that we now know that a hundred people have been turned away from voting already and asked if Rep. Lane could see that number going up.

- Yes. The cities will be voting in November. While those elections are not high-turnout elections, the cities have higher numbers, which will give us more data.

Sarah Burke Cohen, NH Municipal Association

- This will be burdensome for the cities and towns to complete the verification of the rolls annually.
- They have spoken with supervisors of the checklists, and part of the reason this would be burdensome is that they are often volunteers who may have difficulty finding time to do it every year with their day jobs.
- Most of the officials they have spoken to are updating the rolls as often as possible.

Representative Ross Berry, Hillsborough-District 44

- Performing the purge annually will decrease costs. Conducting a ten-year purge requires paying for postage for more people at a higher cost. However, if you purge every year, the same number of people are removed, but you will incur lower postage costs spread throughout those ten years.
- The Secretary of State's new system can handle this for the cities and towns.
- This isn't massively burdensome; removing a massive number of people every ten years is more burdensome.
- This is about keeping the roles clean.
- People talk about missing an election and getting removed, but you would need to miss ten elections to be removed. Four town elections, two state primaries, two state general elections, and a first-in-the-nation primary. You would have to miss anywhere between 9 and 11 elections to be removed.
- If someone hasn't voted in four years, including a presidential election, they likely are not living in that town anymore or are not voters anymore.
- This will just become part of the supervisor's work.
- The Secretary of State can generate the list.
- Voters have a safeguard: They receive a 30-day notice in the mail and can ask not to be removed.
- Understands why it was done before modern databases, but he could likely have put the list together in just the time he has been speaking.
- Does not want to say that the concerns are irrelevant, but they do not hold muster.

Senator Perkins Kwoka said she understands his argument about how it can be done with a simple search, but she doesn't fully understand how it could save costs, especially when an alternative like ERIC is available.

- ERIC has only removed three voters in eleven states in ten years. Democrats like to advocate for its use, but it's not what they say it is.
- Has extensively studied ERIC and says it only undermines the roles.
- When you remove fewer than ten voters and eleven states are involved, it can be argued that ERIC is not doing what it says it is.

- States are pulling out of ERIC. Three or four states have pulled out in the last two years.

Senator Perkins Kwoka asked how annual verification would save costs.

- The cost of postage only goes up, and you are paying less in postage now than you will be in ten years.

Senator Perkins Kwoka asked about the staff time required to check the roles.

- The staff time is the same; you either do it once every ten years or annually and it is dispersed over ten years. It is a longer process to perform the verification when performed every ten years.

Senator Perkin Kwoka asked if Rep. Berry would believe that it takes less time if you spend three hours doing this every ten years than if you spend three hours doing this every year.

- Rep. Berry said he doesn't believe it takes three hours to do this yearly.

Senator Gray asked if Rep. Berry believes Senator Gray supports the Senate position that verification should happen every four years.

- Rep Berry answered that he believes that, but this is the House position, and added that he supports the House position.

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Date Hearing Report completed: May 2, 2025