

Support for HB 314, Recommend Study Committee, Feb. 19, 2025

To the Honorable Members of the Legislative Administration Committee,

I supported the 2024 bill HB 1479 (same language), because as a citizen involved with legislation (mostly election law related) since 2014, I had become completely frustrated with the legislative process, who is heard and who is not....

Why did town and city clerks oppose bills that protect voting rights?

Why did the NHMA oppose bills that allow citizens to do our job, mostly as volunteers, in ensuring transparency and public accountability?

Last year, we heard municipalities say they rely on legal assistance from the NHMA so they don't have to pay for their own attorney. Attorneys would often rather fight than resolve issues. Ask citizens how that works for us who often try to represent ourselves in court while our government can use taxpayer money to fight us every step of the way. We'd rather save our communities money (and all of us time and aggravation) through informal resolution.

Court is usually the only option those who have more power give those of us who have less

Judges can have a bias. We know that our court system favors those with the time and money to use it. More informal procedures...and support....can help resolve problems and develop trust between seeming opposites and unrecognizable positions. The right to know ombudsman is a positive step in that direction.

Public advocacy groups and unions raise their own funds to lobby. And many of us simply represent ourselves and like-minded others from other communities we meet through the legislative process.

Instead of lobbying as a group, public officials can communicate directly with the legislature as a group of election officials did last year. (Will send that directly to the committee.) Another group might have done the same, taking an opposite position instead of the clerks and NHMA appearing to represent them all.

I've looked at the history of municipalities coming together as the NHMA so they could be heard in the legislature. We now need to look at how we ordinary citizens experience them and other voluntary associations supported by tax money...that they represent our communities and school districts, NOT citizens, who have developed an expertise in our area and proposals to solve problems that lobbyists representing our communities do NOT have.

Last year, a member of the NHMA's Executive Committee, town selectman and legislator on the NH Municipal and County Government made the motion to indefinitely postpone the House vote on an amended HB 1479 that sought to find compromise.

In my reading of legislative ethics, he should have recused himself from any involvement with that bill.

I reached out to him and the NHMA in an attempt to resolve this issue informally and received no response from either party.

Damaged trust can be repaired but only if the parties choose that option.

A Better Way at the Local Level

Instead of telling competing stories to legislative committees, we need to find better ways to listen to each other (communities/school districts) and resolve differences at the local level.

When my Acadian ancestors had differences in their communities, they found a mutually trusted person to help them resolve the problem. At least two of my English relatives went to the king to help resolve issues they couldn't resolve through the available colonial process.

My students, with my support, could resolve problems with each other and within our group. We all continually learned the essence of balancing individual rights and responsibility to the group through ongoing practice. Not easy, this democracy.

Please support a study committee where various stakeholders, including public advocacy groups and ordinary people like me can share perspectives and have honest conversations to support both/and solutions instead of either/or.

Us v. them is a trust killer.

Public trust. If government loses that, good luck.

Respectfully,

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Attachment: Example of group testimony of election officials re: 24-HB 1569

PS This recent study by the UNH's Carsey Center shows a decline in civic participation and trust in our government. Trust in local government declined from 53% in 2001 to 36% in 2024.

<https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/2024-new-hampshire-civic-health-report>