



The State Employees' Association Of New Hampshire, Inc.

Service Employees International Union, Local 1984, CTW, CLC

Executive Departments & Administration Committee
NH House of Representatives
Granite Place – Room 231

January 28, 2026

Good afternoon Madam Chairwoman and Honorable Members of the House ED&A Committee. For the record my name is Richard Gulla, President of the NH State Employees' Association / SEIU Local 1984, and I am honored to be representing over 10,000 hard-working New Hampshire public employees and retirees.

We are the men and women who plow our roads, ensure we have clean water to drink, that our children are safe, and our elderly are cared for. We are your neighbors and friends. We are taxpayers. We are dedicated public servants who have helped build New Hampshire and continue to keep New Hampshire great.

Thank you for allowing me to provide comments and concerns relating to **HB 1657 (AS INTRODUCED) - AN ACT RELATIVE TO THE REPORTING AND ELIMINATION OF PROLONGED VACANCIES IN STATE GOVERNMENT.**

I appear before you today on behalf of the New Hampshire State Employees' Association (SEA), which represents more than 10,000 public employees working in nearly every state agency. On behalf of our members, we respectfully **Oppose HB 1657.**

While SEA shares the Legislature's interest in transparency, accountability, and responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, HB 1657 moves the state in the wrong direction and would worsen, not solve, the staffing and service-delivery challenges facing New Hampshire government today.

HB 1657 Treats Vacancies as Waste — When They Are Often a Symptom of Systemic Problems

This bill is premised on the assumption that positions vacant for 90 days are unnecessary or expendable. That assumption is incorrect and dangerously simplistic.

In reality, prolonged vacancies most often result from:

- Uncompetitive wages and salary compression
- Lengthy hiring and classification approval processes
- Hard-to-fill specialized or credentialed positions
- Hiring freezes or delayed fiscal approvals
- Workforce burnout and retention challenges

Eliminating positions because they remain vacant, without addressing why they are vacant, penalizes agencies for conditions outside their control and locks in understaffing as permanent policy.

HB 1657 would most certainly keep what we see as already high costs, high. DOC is the best example. Their lack of staffing is what causes the significant overtime that employees make, and the OT is often earned at the higher levels (i.e. sgts, Lts, and Cpts), because those positions must be filled, and as a matter of process the CO positions go vacant. By eliminating unfilled positions, it would cement the current problem of understaffing, and would ensure that the State would need to continue mandatory overtime at the double-time rate indefinitely, even though it would be less costly to meet the operational needs by filling lower paid CO vacancies.

The 90-Day Threshold Is Arbitrary and Operationally Harmful

A 90-day vacancy threshold fails to reflect the realities of public-sector hiring. Many positions, particularly in:

- Corrections
- Public health
- Information technology
- Engineering
- Legal and regulatory fields

Routinely take longer than 90 days to recruit and onboard, even under ideal conditions.

Under HB 1657, agencies would be barred from filling these positions without express approval of the Governor and Executive Council, creating:

- Additional bureaucratic delay
- Political bottlenecks in routine workforce decisions
- Further disincentives for qualified applicants

This bill effectively adds a second hiring freeze mechanism, one that applies even when funding is available and operational need is clear.

In addition, agencies sometimes drag vacant positions in order to meet anticipated back of the budget cuts. The 90 day vacancy / elimination of positions would create a significant problem with the ability of agencies to meet these budgetary requirements and would require them to eliminate filled positions as opposed to vacant ones.



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HB 1657 Undermines Agency Management and Workforce Planning

The bill centralizes staffing authority away from agency leadership and professionals who best understand operational needs. Instead, it substitutes a legislative review-and-elimination process that:

- Lacks programmatic context
- Does not evaluate workload or service demand
- Risks eliminating positions critical to public safety and compliance

Vacancy status alone is not a reliable metric for determining whether a position is needed. Agencies require flexibility to manage turnover, recruitment cycles, grant timing, and seasonal demands.

This Bill Will Reduce Services and Increase Costs Over Time

Permanent elimination of positions will:

- Increase overtime costs
- Accelerate burnout among remaining staff
- Increase reliance on contractors and consultants at higher cost
- Delay services to the public
- Increase error rates and liability exposure

These outcomes cost more, not less, and undermine public confidence in state government.

SEA Supports Transparency, But Not Automatic Elimination

SEA is not opposed to transparency or reporting. If the Legislature wishes to better understand vacancy trends, we would support:

- Contextual vacancy reporting tied to recruitment barriers
- Workforce planning studies
- Investments in pay equity and retention
- Streamlining hiring and classification processes

What we cannot support is a policy that converts temporary staffing challenges into permanent service reductions.

Conclusion

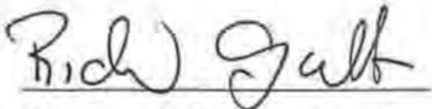
HB 1657 would:

- Entrench understaffing
- Centralize hiring decisions
- Reduce public services
- Increase long-term costs
- Further destabilize an already strained workforce

For these reasons, the New Hampshire State Employees' Association respectfully urges the Committee to recommend HB 1657 as Inexpedient to Legislate.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully Submitted for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Richard Gulla", written over a horizontal line.

**Richard Gulla, President
State Employees'
Association of NH
SEIU Local 1984**