

AFT-NH Testimony opposing HB1774



To Chairwoman Noble and members of the House Education Policy Committee

My name is Debrah Howes, President of the American Federation of Teachers–New Hampshire. I’m here on behalf of our 3,500 members who work in preK–12 public education, public services, and higher education across the Granite State. We are New Hampshire taxpayers, voters, and many of us are parents or grandparents of public-school students.

We urge you to reject **HB 1774**, a bill that creates real harm for our students, our communities, and the future of public education in New Hampshire.

We have grave concerns about **HB 1774** shifting state higher education policy toward a narrow definition of value, one based solely on post-graduation earnings. The bill prohibits state funding for any academic program designated as a “low-earning outcome program,” a label determined through federal formulas. A program can be labeled “low-earning” when the average starting salary is lower than jobs that don’t require bachelor’s degree.ⁱ

HB 1774 asks a narrow question, “What did graduates earn?” and treats that as the whole story. But New Hampshire’s future depends on more than just wages: it depends on teachers in every community, social workers in every county, and public institutions that educate the balanced workforce we actually need in the Granite State.

If we are reducing the value of a career to a paycheck, consider that the average starting teacher salary in New Hampshire is about \$42,588, which ranks in the bottom 75 percent for teacher pay nationally,ⁱⁱ and is less than the \$45,980 earned by the average construction laborer.ⁱⁱⁱ Yet our communities need both workers! If the only yardstick that matters is earnings, then **HB 1774** makes us an agent of our own self-destruction. We underpay the people doing the teaching job, then defund the teacher preparation programs because the job is underpaid.

And then, who will teach the children in our schools so they can learn, thrive and follow their own path to success?

HB 1774 hands New Hampshire's higher education funding decisions over to a federal test that was designed to determine federal student aid, not for state budgeting, state workforce planning, or the public good of the Granite State. NH needs more educators, counselors, social workers, childcare workers and other public-serving professionals, not fewer, yet with this bill we would allow a federal plan to decide what we need with no consideration of our educational, economic, or community-driven needs.

Under **HB 1774**, Granite State public universities face revenue losses if "low-earning" programs must be cut, with fiscal estimates ranging from hundreds of thousands to more than \$2.5 million depending on how definitions are finalized. This loss of revenue will lead to tuition increases, reduction of course offerings, elimination of faculty positions, and a scaling back of student services. In a state where public college is already very costly and out of reach for many families, **HB 1774** threatens to make higher education even less accessible.

HB 1774 also includes participation in the new federal tax credit school voucher program. This bill is simply a voucher mechanism masquerading as tax code. We can't know the overall state revenue effect of this federal tax credit voucher because the federal rules are still being written. Without finished regulations, we can't gauge if it's possible, let alone advisable, for NH to participate. This tax credit may bump up against existing NH credits, making it unclear how credits and carryforwards would work, complicating everything for taxpayers.

The biggest problem with **HB 1774** is that it judges value only by salary, but New Hampshire's values are bigger than that. All jobs build the Granite State, and all labor has dignity. Teachers, parents, and community members share a common goal: ensuring that every Granite State child is prepared not only for a job, but for a meaningful life and full participation in our civic society. Education is not a marketplace to be micromanaged by earnings metrics. It is a public good, one that sustains our economy, strengthens our communities, and enriches our democracy.

HB 1774 undermines that mission at every turn. It devalues essential professions, destabilizes our higher-education system, creates uncertainty for families, and erects new bureaucratic hurdles with no clear benefit.

For these reasons, on behalf of the members of AFT-NH, I urge you to find **HB 1744** “inexpedient to legislate.” Our students and our communities deserve better than this bill.

Sincerely,

Debrah Howes



President, AFT-New Hampshire

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/1087d>

<https://www.nea.org/resource-library/educator-pay-and-student-spending-how-does-your-state-rank>

https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/oes_nh.htm