

AFT-NH Testimony Opposing HB 1815

From AFT-NH Pres. Debrah Howes

Feb. 13, 2026



To: Chairman Ladd and members of the House Education Funding Committee.

My name is Debrah Howes, President of the American Federation of Teachers–NH. I write on behalf of our 3,500 members who work in preK through grade 12 public education, in public services, and in private and public universities across the Granite State. We are taxpayers and citizens of New Hampshire, and many of us are parents or grandparents of public-school students.

On behalf of my members, their families and the students and communities we serve, I urge you to vote NO on **HB 1815** because it harms Granite State public school students and pushes unsustainable costs onto local property taxpayers.

HB 1815 redefines “adequate education” by tying it to a specific list of subjects in the school-approval standards, limiting what the state is obligated to fund. It also declares that decisions about raising, allocating, and spending education dollars are a “political policy matter” reserved to the legislative and executive branches, limiting judicial oversight that has historically protected students’ constitutional right to an adequate education.

HB 1815’s model funds only a one-size-fits-all version of public education one that largely works for students who are already performing on grade level and need only the basic course list. It does not work for students who have learning gaps because their families move multiple times, who face frequent illness, are learning English, are coping with poverty or family crisis, or who require special-education supports to access their public education. These students rely on tutoring, interventionists, counseling, expanded language supports, enrichment, and other services outside the bill’s narrow minimum. In short, **HB 1815** would only fund an adequate education for some of the students in our public schools, yet public schools must educate all of our students.

HB 1815 absolves the State of responsibility for those very necessary costs of supporting student learning and engagement and shifts them onto local districts. These costs make up a large share of real school budgets and are essential to ensure every child truly receives an adequate public education. The result is predictable: existing disparities in a student’s opportunity to receive an adequate public-school education will get worse depending on which district they live in.

Low-income students are the most reliant on supports not covered by the bill’s narrowed adequacy definition, reading and math intervention, tutoring, homework clubs, enrichment, extracurriculars, and counseling. When districts must choose between meeting the bare minimum or funding these

supports, low-income students are the first to lose out, widening achievement gaps **HB 1815** does nothing to address.

While federal law requires special-education services, it doesn't come close to fully funding them. **HB 1815's** funding framework starves the general education infrastructure that makes those services work: literacy and math interventionists, paraprofessionals, inclusion supports, and specialized materials. Under tighter budgets, districts will cut these supports or resort to more out-of-district placements, disrupting learning and increasing costs with no added state responsibility.

HB 1815 repeatedly frames education finance as a state-local "shared responsibility," then declares funding decisions off-limits to judicial correction. In practice, that means the state can fund less and local property taxpayers must fund more, especially in rural and low-valuation towns with the least capacity to pay. Eliminating the judicial backstop invites continued or deeper underfunding at the state level and locks in higher local taxes—with the fewest resources concentrated where needs are greatest.

To be clear, this is not reform; it's cost-shifting. **HB 1815** narrows the state's duty to the bare minimum and transfers the real, human costs of educating all children: including those who move often during their school years, are frequently ill, are learning English, are in poverty or crisis, or need special-education supports to local districts and taxpayers. Those costs are not "extras"; they are core to making public education real for every child. Stripping state responsibility for these costs guarantees a widening gap between the haves and the have-nots and diminished opportunity for a public education in different communities across New Hampshire. This is the Legislature in Concord picking winners and losers.

A child's opportunity for a full public education should not depend on their family's income or their town's tax base. **HB 1815** lowers the bar for what the state must provide, removes accountability, and sends the bill to property taxpayers, while students with the greatest needs pay the highest price.

Please vote NO on **HB 1815**.

Sincerely,

Debrah Howes



President, AFT-New Hampshire