

AFT-NH Testimony on HB1712
From Debrah Howes, President AFT-NH
Feb 24, 2026



To Chairman Noble and members of the House Education Policy and Administration 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.

Overall, AFT-NH is neutral on this bill as it is currently written. The biggest reason for this is that **HB1712** does not change the current requirements for how a community uses its votes to express its desire for or in opposition to converting a traditional district public school into a charter conversion school. **HB1712** keeps the existing approval process; it still requires both a vote of the school board and a two-thirds majority vote of school district voters at a regular annual meeting with appropriate warrant language. This mirrors the existing law. **HB1712** primarily reorganizes the charter-conversion provisions into a dedicated section without changing how communities approve such a conversion. Protecting local control and the ability for a supermajority of voters to have their say in this decision is a key reason why we are neutral on this bill.

We find it encouraging that **HB1712** includes protections for all students in a traditional district public school to be accepted and accommodated in the public charter conversion school. Keeping students in their communities with their classmates in a consistent and predictable learning environment helps students feel a sense of belonging at school and supports their academic achievement. This also preserves continuity for families.

The bill explicitly states that nothing in the conversion of a district public school to a public charter school limits a district's obligation to provide students with special education services in accordance with state and federal law. Students with disabilities retain their full rights under IDEA and Section 504, and the district must ensure services continue appropriately.

These provisions help ensure charter conversion schools, which are public schools after all, remain inclusive public schools, open and welcoming to all students in their district of residence. It ensures that students with disabilities are not segregated or displaced.

While the student access language is clear and positive, **HB1712** raises fiscal concerns about the availability of funding from state revenue as well as the unsupported costs left to local districts, the bulk of which are paid for by local property taxpayers.

Traditional district public schools in the current year receive a base adequacy amount per pupil of \$4,265.64, with additional differential aid for students who are low-income, receive special education, or are English language learners. Public charter schools receive the same base adequacy of \$4,265.64 per pupil plus an additional charter school grant of \$4,900 per pupil, adjusted annually by statute.

Publicly funding two school systems can never be as efficient as funding one, since there will always be duplications, inefficiencies and overlaps between the systems. When you have a state funding system resistant to meeting the actual needs of students in district schools, and a legislature that has repeatedly decreased revenue sources as a policy choice, there are concerns about the fiscal impact of any bill that encouraged charter school conversion. For example, in a state that is already struggling to fund even modest increases to the \$2,184 in differentiated aid per student with identified special education needs, an amount meant to help districts meet legally mandated learning support services but that falls far short of the roughly \$30,000 average cost per student, it is hard to comprehend how the state could sustainably finance the increased cost of base adequacy and the additional charter school grant if the number of charter schools grows through the charter conversion process. The gap between what the state currently contributes and what districts are legally required to provide is already wide; expanding charter obligations without expanding state revenue makes that funding challenge even more difficult to reconcile, and it is the local property taxpayers who are left picking up the many costs not funded by the state.

Another concern about the charter conversion process is whether voters understand what costs they will be responsible for after the conversion. As exists under current law, local district must continue to pay not less than 80% of the district's average cost per pupil to the conversion charter school. **HB1712** does nothing to change this, so it is neutral there. Local taxpayers may be expecting savings on their school district budget through a charter conversion that they will not be getting. Clear communication about what obligation the district has to pay in a conversion must be clearly explained in any presentation to voters and printed as part of any warrant article on a charter conversion vote.

In a state that relies so heavily on local property taxpayers to fund public education, adding new educational options that receive state revenue inevitably shifts a greater share of unfunded costs onto local communities. When a traditional district public school converts to a charter school, the district must still cover fixed operational expenses that cannot be quickly reduced. such as buildings, transportation, and staffing, while also paying the required $\geq 80\%$ per-pupil tuition to the district authorized charter school. As a result, local property taxpayers end up supporting two parallel systems instead of one, often with reduced efficiency and increased financial pressure.

As previously stated, AFT-NH is neutral on **HB1712** as it is currently written because it does not change the community-driven voting mechanism for conversion.

We find the bill's language ensuring that all students, including those receiving special education, retain access and that districts must continue providing required services consistent with state and federal law. We support clearly stating those protections here.

We have concerns about the fiscal impacts of charter conversion schools. While this bill does not change those impacts from current law, strengthening required information sharing through public meetings and disclosure on warrant articles and ballots would allow local property taxpayers to know realistically how much additional cost they are taking on when considering whether to convert a traditional district public school to a charter school.

Finally, having the State of New Hampshire meet its constitutional obligation to all Granite State students to fund a robust public education through our public-school districts would go far to alleviating the concerns with the conversion charter school process. It would be refreshing to focus solely on the merits of differing pedagogical approaches to learning and assessment rather than the fiscal impact each new system of choice brings with it and how that limits educational opportunity for students in our traditional public district schools.

Sincerely,

Debrah Howes

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debrah Howes".

President, AFT-New Hampshire