



February 25th, 2026

House Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs Committee
Subject: Testimony to HB 1337

Dear Honorable Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Louis Esposito, and I serve as the Executive Director of ABLE NH, a disability advocacy organization working to advance the civil and human rights of people with disabilities across New Hampshire. As someone who has worked directly with students with disabilities both as a teacher and as a community advocate, I have seen firsthand how systems, when fragmented or outdated, fail to meet the needs of individuals on the autism spectrum and their families. HB 1337 moves New Hampshire in the wrong direction by eliminating one of the state's primary coordination structures: the New Hampshire Council on Autism Spectrum Disorders.

The Importance of the New Hampshire Council on Autism Spectrum Disorders

Since its inception, the Council has played a critical role in shaping policy, identifying gaps, and coordinating services for individuals on the spectrum.

The reality is that the needs of the autism community have evolved, not diminished.

- Diagnostic criteria have changed over time. The transition from DSM-IV to DSM-5 broadened the understanding of autism and expanded who is included under the spectrum.
- Individuals who were children when the council was created are now adults navigating employment, housing, healthcare, and community life.
- Systems themselves have grown more complex, with technology, education pathways, service models, and workforce challenges reshaping how supports must be designed.

These changes increase the need for coordination. They do not justify eliminating it.

Repealing the council removes a structure designed specifically to help the state respond to evolving realities.

One of the most important functions of the council is ensuring that lived experience has a formal role in policy development.

For too long, policies and services have been shaped primarily by professionals. While professional expertise is important, it is equally critical to include the voices of people who experience autism directly.

- Self-advocates bring insight into navigating education, employment, healthcare, and independent living.
- Families identify gaps in services and barriers to access.
- Cross-system representation helps ensure policy reflects real life, not just program design.

This is not simply about representation. It is about making better decisions.

Eliminating the council removes one of the state's structured mechanisms for this input.

Councils exist to address exactly these challenges. They help identify system gaps, align agencies, and surface priorities that may otherwise go unseen.

Without coordination infrastructure, fragmentation increases.

HB 1337 Is Not a Neutral Change

HB 1337 does not update the council.

It does not modernize it.

It removes it entirely.

If there are concerns about effectiveness, the appropriate response is improvement, not elimination.

New Hampshire should be strengthening cross-system coordination, not dismantling it.

The needs of the autism community have grown more complex over time. That reality calls for stronger coordination, stronger lived-experience input, and stronger accountability, not less.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Louis Esposito". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Louis" and last name "Esposito" clearly distinguishable.

Louis Esposito, Ed. D
Louis@ablenh.org

References