



3/17/2026

Chairman Roy and Members of the House Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Alissa Cannon, and I serve as the Executive Director of the New Hampshire Juvenile Court Diversion Network (NHJCDN). We are a statewide, Concord-based nonprofit that promotes and facilitates community-based alternatives to the formal juvenile court process. NHJCDN supports accredited local diversion programs that hold youth accountable while addressing root causes of behavior through restorative justice, education, and family engagement. I am writing in opposition to SB 409 relative to the penalties for the offense of disobeying an officer.

Our network works with youth across New Hampshire to divert them from formal involvement in the justice system and to promote accountability, rehabilitation, and long term positive outcomes. From this perspective, SB 409 raises several concerns, particularly regarding its potential impact on adolescents.

First, adolescent brain development must be central to any policy affecting youth. At age 16, young people are still in a developmental phase that extends into their mid twenties. While they may demonstrate adult like decision making in calm situations, research shows that under stress or pressure, they are significantly more prone to impulsivity and risk taking. Encounters with law enforcement are, by definition, high stress situations. Expecting a fully mature and compliant response in these moments does not align with what is known about adolescent development.

Second, there is a clear gap in education and preparation. The New Hampshire Driver's Education Manual has very limited training for young drivers on how to navigate interactions with law enforcement, including traffic stops or understanding lawful commands. Without this foundational knowledge, youth may unintentionally fail to comply, not out of defiance, but out of confusion or fear. Increasing penalties in this context risks criminalizing behavior that stems from a lack of education rather than intent.

Third, the bill raises concerns about discretion and escalation. While law enforcement officers receive training, real world application varies, and interactions with youth can be especially complex. Without clear safeguard language that accounts for developmental differences, this legislation could increase the likelihood of escalation and expand juvenile involvement in the criminal justice system. This runs counter to the goals of diversion, which aim to reduce system contact and promote more constructive interventions.

New Hampshire has made meaningful progress in advancing diversion based, developmentally appropriate responses to youth behavior and SB 409 moves in the opposite direction.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose SB 409.

Thank you for your consideration.

Alissa Cannon

Executive Director

New Hampshire Juvenile Court Diversion Network