

**New Hampshire Municipal Association**

THE SERVICE AND ACTION ARM OF NEW HAMPSHIRE MUNICIPALITIES

# LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

**Legislative Bulletin 10**

**2026 Session**

**March 6, 2026**



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**Editor’s Note:** Every year, New Hampshire residents gather for town meetings and elections to vote on budgets, elect officials, and decide what kind of community they want

to live in. As we head into town meeting season, NHMA has prepared a [handout](#) highlighting the important role local governments play in the daily lives of their residents.

## House to Vote on Anti-NHMA Bills

[HB 1359](#) and [HB 1360](#)—a pair of bills taking **aim at NHMA’s ability to advocate and at member municipalities’ ability to govern the organization**—are will be acted on by the House when it meets on **Wednesday, March 11**, and **Thursday, March 12**.

Both bills are recommended as **inexpedient to legislate** (ITL) on identical 9-1 votes; however, despite the overwhelming vote, both bills are on the House *regular* calendar, meaning **they will be voted on separately, and floor amendments could be introduced**. In fact, a committee member referenced a potential amendment to **HB 1360** at the executive session last week.

This is why **we need everyone who cares about local government** having a collective voice at the State House to **reach out to their [local House members](#)** to impress upon them the value NHMA provides and to **ask them to support the ITL motion and oppose any last-minute amendments or moves to table the either bill**.

See the [January 23 Bulletin](#) for more on these bills.

## Bills Target SB 2 Towns

Two more bills **opposed** by NHMA are also on the next week’s House calendar:

[HB 1224](#) makes major changes to default budget calculations in SB 2 (official ballot law) towns, making financial management more restrictive and complicated:

- **Hiring Restrictions:** Non-public safety positions left vacant for over a year must be removed from the default budget, even if municipalities are actively recruiting. This could prevent towns from filling essential roles and worsen staffing shortages.
- **Salary & Benefit Limits:** The bill forbids default budgets from including salary or benefit increases made after the previous budget was adopted. This limits the ability of select boards to manage staff compensation effectively.
- **Budget Transfer Complications:** The bill requires default budgets to exclude funds transferred for one-time expenditures, even though such transfers are necessary for town operations. This contradicts existing laws and increases administrative confusion.

Overall, **HB 1224** would make budgeting more rigid, complicating hiring, salary adjustments, and financial flexibility needed for routine governance.

**HB 1418** would **void votes on warrant articles on an SB 2 town's operating budget or any other appropriation** unless at least 15 percent of the registered voters of the town cast a "Yes" vote on the question and a majority of those voting vote "Yes." This means low turnout due to bad weather or non-controversial warrant articles/uncontested elections would disenfranchise those who chose to participate in the democratic process.

**Contact your [local House members](#) to oppose these bills.** One additional concern NHMA has is that representatives from places that aren't under the official ballot law will not understand the impact of these bills, so remind your representatives to educate their colleagues next week on why these bill needs to be defeated.

## Support Day Care Minority Amendment

**HB 1195**, which greatly expands the existing zoning mandate requiring home-based day care be permitted as an accessory use, is going to the House next week as ought-to-pass as amended (OTP-A). Unfortunately, the majority amendment adopted does not address many of the core issues with the bill, including the provisions that tie zoning ordinances related to in-home child care centers to state rulemaking.

NHMA **opposes** this bill as introduced and as amended because of costs and its impact on local decision-making. However, the committee minority amendment is a far more palatable alternative.

Please begin contacting your [local House members](#) and ask them to **oppose the OTP-A motion and support the minority amendment**. Also tell them zoning mandates are unlikely to alleviate the real barriers for expanding child care—labor availability and wage and overhead costs.

## HB 1704: Costly 'Solution,' Non-existent Problem

**HB 1704** would give large swaths of public employees the ability to negotiate wages, hours, or other employment terms directly with their employer, which would **dismantle established labor relations, create administrative burdens and decrease efficiency, and raise significant legal and constitutional concerns** that will lead to expensive lawsuits—all of which, ultimately, increase costs for taxpayers.

The bill will be voted on by the House next **Wednesday** or **Thursday**. Please **contact your [local House members](#) and oppose HB 1704**.

See the [February 20 Bulletin](#) for more reasons to oppose this bill.

## **HB 1788: More Legal Exposure for Municipalities**

**HB 1788**, as amended, will void contracts that contain DEI language and open municipalities up to potential lawsuits from citizens anywhere in the state. The bill will be voted on by the House next **Wednesday** or **Thursday**; NHMA **opposes** the bill over the cost issues.

**HB 1788** prohibits the state and political subdivisions from entering into or renewing any contract that includes diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)-related provisions, including requirements for contractors to implement DEI programs, conduct DEI training, or comply with DEI-related reporting obligations and require contracts to be void if they contain such language. Setting aside for a moment that the language tucked into the state budget last year is on hold pending the outcome of a lawsuit filed in federal court, **HB 1788** also empowers any “citizen” to bring a cause of action against any public entity, state agency, or political subdivision if they believe the law has been violated. In other words, some keyboard warrior in Amherst could sue the town of Madison over perceived DEI-ish language in an off-the-shelf training module or a document destruction contract—and then sue a dozen more towns that use the same module or contract.

Reach out to your [local House members](#) to **oppose this bill** because it will increase legal costs related to nuisance lawsuits allowed under this bill.

## **HB 1064 Will Increase Municipal Costs**

**HB 1064**, a bill **opposed** by NHMA that expands municipal liability, increases damage caps, and mandates indemnification of employees, is on the House consent calendar on **Wednesday, March 11**.

As you have read above, there are **multiple problematic bills** up for a vote next week, but please **contact your [local House members](#)** and ask them to **remove HB 1064 from the consent calendar and oppose it** because it will lead to fiscal instability and higher taxes.

While intended to expand liability and improve compensation for injured parties, **HB 1064** goes too far and creates serious financial risks for municipalities. Significantly raising liability caps will increase insurance and risk pool costs, which will lead to a combination of property tax increases and reductions in municipal services.

Additionally, **HB 1064** will limit a municipality’s ability to claim immunity as a defense in negligence claims, meaning municipalities will have greater financial exposure. Small

communities will be disproportionately impacted, as a single large claim could force cuts to public safety, roads, or education. Further, mandatory indemnification removes important local discretion and weakens accountability.

## On the Bright Side ...

There a sliver of potential good news next week:

**RTK bill up for vote in Senate:** [SB 626](#), on the **Thursday, March 12**, Senate regular calendar as ought to pass as **amended** (OTP-A), defines citizen for the purposes of right-to-know requests. Adding the definition of “citizen” to RSA 91-A aligns with the New Hampshire Constitution, eliminates ambiguity, and allows public entities to filter access to governmental records in a way that continues to ensure New Hampshire citizens have full access to public records. It also would prevent bad-faith actors with no ties to the state from overwhelming public entities with burdensome or irrelevant requests unconnected to government accountability, such as marketing lead-generation services, which can eat up municipal staff time and resources, potentially leading to higher property taxes. NHMA **supports** this bill and encourages members to **ask your [local senator to vote for SB 626](#)**.

**Sludge application moratorium:** The five-year moratorium on the land application of sludge and biosolids for agricultural use was amended out of [HB 1275](#) this week. This bill, up for a vote in the House next week, creates a fund for farmers who have experienced losses or incurred costs due to the presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in soil, water, or agricultural products. NHMA opposed the moratorium, which would deprive municipal wastewater utilities of a major pathway of biosolid management and lead to higher costs and operational challenges.

## Oppose Overly Broad Conflict of Interest Bill

On **Tuesday, March 10, at 9:30 a.m. in State House (SH) Room 122-123**, the [Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee](#) will hold public hearings on [HB 488](#), a bill dealing with potential municipal conflicts of interest that would ban elected officials and municipal employees from wearing “too many hats.” Regardless of how well-intentioned the bill may be, it goes too far and has the potential to hamstring small-town government operations.

Many towns already struggle to recruit volunteers for governing boards, and additional eligibility restrictions worsen the problem, potentially preventing boards from reaching a quorum to address critical issues. The prohibitions in **HB 488** are overly broad, confusing, and not based on inherent conflicts. For example, barring selectmen from serving as assessors is unnecessary, as those duties often overlap. Additionally,

restrictions on serving on land use or planning boards are ambiguous, such as what it means to provide “support for” a land use board, and would restrict many residents despite no inherent conflicts in most cases.

Please **testify or [email the committee](#) to oppose this SB 488**. For detailed instructions on ways to share your position on this and any other bills, see “How to Make Your Voice Heard” below.

## **Risk Pool Update: Still Worlds Apart**

Two of the three bills related to risk pools, [HB 1491](#) and [SB 605](#), were reported out of the committee this week.

Risk pools are created by cities, towns, counties, and school districts to reduce risks and associated insurance costs, shifting risk from an individual political subdivision to the pool.

**HB 1491** was recommended as ought to pass (OTP) and is on the House consent calendar on **Wednesday**. **HB 1491**, which NHMA **supports**, introduces assessable risk pools into the statutory scheme as an alternative to non-assessable risk pools. Allowing both models provides clarity to local governments, helping them decide which model, if any, best suits their needs. This distinction is consistent Association of Governmental Risk Pools (AGRIP) standards, which recognizes both models of risk pools. Assessable pools will remain under the authority of the Secretary of State, while non-assessable pools will shift oversight to the Department of Insurance (DOI).

**SB 605** was recommended as inexpedient to legislate (ITL) with the intention of tabling it to serve as a place holder for future risk pool amendments, if any. The bill is on **Thursday**'s Senate calendar. The bill would have allowed risk pools to levy special assessments on political subdivisions if the pool's agreement, contractual provisions, or bylaws indicate the right to do so; in doing so, the bill clarifies that assessments are not required by statute. The bill included a 36-month payment window for any assessments. NHMA had no position on the payment period, but strongly supported the sections of the bill giving a risk pool the option whether or not to levy assessments.

The remaining bill, [SB 661](#), is still with the [Senate Finance Committee](#), which is considering possible amendments.

**HB 1491** and **SB 661** take fundamentally different approaches to further regulation of risk pools, reflecting the views of their respective chambers. Versions of both of these bills failed last year, and it remains unclear if there is any path forward.

NHMA supports the ability of members to establish and govern the pools and understands that clear regulations that protect the members and allow the pools to operate are necessary. With health insurance being a huge driver of municipal costs, regularly outpacing inflation, providing legislative clarity is crucial. It is important to keep in mind that the stability of healthcare risk pools is tied to the future stability of healthcare for thousands of public employees in our state.

## **Mixed results on Housing Bills**

The **House Housing Committee** held executive sessions Tuesday on several bills:

### **Bills opposed by NHMA**

**HB 1079:** Recommended ought to pass with amendment (OTP-A). NHMA supported the original bill, allowing accessory dwelling units to be built within or attached to certain nonconforming structures. In fact, NHMA requested **HB 1079** on behalf of our members and drafted the bill for the prime sponsor. Section 2 of the original bill addressed a very narrow technical issue our members were inquiring about. The bill now provides extraordinary protections to specific ADUs and expands the current ADU mandate. It applies subdivision-vesting exemptions to ADUs, which will be confusing and difficult to implement because these two sections of law address two very different types of development. **Contact your [local House members](#) to oppose the amended bill.**

**HB 1151:** Recommended for interim study. This bill restricts municipal downzoning inconsistent with existing neighborhood density.

**HB 1357:** Recommended for interim study. This bill allows placement of manufactured housing in all residential zones.

**HB 1681:** Recommended OTP-A. This bill enables municipalities to allow tiny houses and yurts as innovative housing structures. While the bill is not a mandate, it contains several technical issues the committee did not address, which is why NHMA advocated the bill be referred to interim study to address these issues.

### **Bills Supported by NHMA**

**HB 1540:** Recommended OTP-A. This bill regulates ADUs in protected shoreland districts. The amendment improves the bill, but it still requires more work.

**HB 1026:** Recommended inexpedient to legislate (ITL). The bill gives municipalities the option to prohibit accessory dwelling units associated with manufactured housing.

**HB 1103:** OTP-A. This bill enables municipalities to establish a housing opportunity zone through a vote of their legislative body. To qualify for tax relief, structures and properties must be located within this designated zone.

For more background on the success of state and local partnerships and the troubling drift to heavy-handed state preemption of local options, check out NHMA's [recently released whitepaper](#), "Room for Everyone," which traces the roots of the housing deficit back nearly two decades, outlining the economic, demographic, and market forces that fueled rising prices and constrained supply. The NHMA paper also advocates for renewed partnership between the state and municipalities, emphasizing that effective housing policy must include infrastructure investment, targeted incentives, and flexible, locally tailored tools.

## House and Senate Roundup

The House and Senate met on Thursday. Here are some bills NHMA was watching:

### Senate

**SB 527** (**passed** with [floor amendment](#)), allows written notices from state agencies to municipalities to be sent via electronic mail unless the town or city clerk notifies the state agency that it objects to emailed written notices. Each state agency using email for written notices must maintain an up-to-date list of email addresses for each town or city clerk and a list of those towns or cities that object to emailed notices. NHMA is neutral on this bill, which will advance to the House.

**SB 627** (**passed** with [floor amendment](#)), raises turnpike tolls for out-of-state drivers only, with the additional revenue to be used to support the state's 10-year highway plan. NHMA is neutral on this bill, which will advance to the House.

**SB 441**, which enables municipalities to request a hearing regarding the residency of an assisted person in cases where there is disagreement on which municipality has financial responsibility for local welfare, was special ordered to March 19. NHMA **opposes** the bill in favor of a forthcoming amendment to **HB 348** that includes more comprehensive language on this issue based on input from local welfare administrators.

### House

**HB 1134** (**passed** with [amendment](#)), is a technically flawed bill that mandates appropriations for warrant articles shall accumulate in the order in which articles are approved at an annual meeting or in the order in which articles appear on an official ballot

for purposes of determining when a warrant article will trigger an override vote of a local tax or budget cap. NHMA **opposes** this bill, which will advance to the Senate.

## **Legislative Policy Proposals Welcome**

NHMA has a member-driven process by which it establishes the legislative policy positions to guide staff advocacy activities over the coming legislative biennium.

If there is a law affecting municipal government that you think needs to be fixed, or if you have an idea for how the functions of local government might be improved with legislation, this is **your opportunity to propose a change**. To share your proposal, complete this [Legislative Policy Proposal Form](#). Include a brief (one or two sentence) policy statement, a statement about the municipal interest served by the proposal and an explanation that describes the nature of the problem or concern from a municipal perspective and discusses the proposed action that is being advocated to address the problem. Mail to NHMA, 25 Triangle Park Drive, Concord, NH 03301; or e-mail to [governmentaffairs@nhmunicipal.org](mailto:governmentaffairs@nhmunicipal.org) no later than the close of business on **April 17, 2026**.

Learn more about NHMA's 2027-2028 Legislative Policy Process in this [Questions and Answers fact sheet](#).

## **How to Make your Voice Heard**

If a bill is of importance to your municipality, it's always best to make your case – for or against – in person. Every Friday, NHMA posts a [Bill Hearings Schedule](#) for the upcoming week. However, if you can't make it to Concord, you can use the Legislature's online portal to put your position on the hearing record.

The House has an [online testimony submission system](#) that allows you to indicate your position on the bill with an option to attach testimony. If you want to email all the members of a House committee, you will have to copy their email addresses individually from the [committee page](#).

The Senate has [a remote sign-in sheet](#) where you can indicate whether you are supportive of a bill, opposed, or neutral. Written testimony can be submitted via the "Email Entire Committee" link found on the [Senate committee page](#).

If you have time to follow along, livestreams of [House](#) and [Senate](#) sessions and committee meetings are available on YouTube. Prior sessions and committee meetings are also archived.

Finally, if you just want to contact your local legislators, there are [Contact a Senator](#) and [Contact a Representative](#) links on the [General Court](#) website.

**Note:** For any readers who print these emails out, all of the above links can be found on the General Court website at: <https://gc.nh.gov/>

## Follow Bills That Matter to You Online

In addition to our weekly Legislative Bulletin, NHMA provides members access to FastDemocracy, an online bill tracking platform, for efficient, real-time updates to legislative activity of interest to members. Visit our online [Bill Tracker](#) page to learn more and feel free to subscribe to weekly or daily updates on subjects and bills of interest.

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