

New Hampshire lawmakers push for moratorium on new landfills until 2030

BY: **CLAIRE SULLIVAN** - JANUARY 31, 2025 10:15 AM



A landfill run by Casella Waste Systems in Bethlehem racked up hundreds of violations related to leachate within a year. (Photo by Claire Sullivan/New Hampshire Bulletin)

Gov. Kelly Ayotte has said no landfill will be built near Forest Lake in Dalton – but what about other landfills in other places?

House Bill 171 would prohibit the Department of Environmental Services from permitting a new landfill in the state until 2030. Its bipartisan group of sponsors hope hitting the pause button will allow for the state to address a myriad of solid waste issues, particularly the state's siting standards, which advocates argue are far too weak, and the hundreds of thousands of tons of out-of-state waste dumped in New Hampshire landfills each year.

“Unless and until we do our job as a Legislature and take action to address this critical issue, we should not be considering opening another landfill that is not needed for New Hampshire's solid waste needs,” said Rep. Nicholas Germana, the Keene Democrat leading the bill, at a Tuesday committee hearing.

A little less than half of the trash dumped into the state's landfills comes from other states, according to a report from DES published in 2023. From 2020 to 2022, that equated to more than 2.6 million tons of outside waste.

And with that trash, proponents of the bill noted, comes harmful chemicals like PFAS, which are commonly used in consumer and industrial products, and are linked to health effects including some cancers. Some nearby states prohibit the disposal of certain waste within its borders, making the Granite State the target for that trash instead.

“There are things that we can't send into Massachusetts, Vermont, or Maine that we do actually take in return, because they have regulations in place that we do not,” Germana said.

Germana argued the state has ample capacity to allow for a temporary pause in building new landfills while policymakers address critical issues in the state's solid waste management.

And perhaps there's no time like the present for trash issues in the state. Though legislation aimed at waste has faced an uphill battle in the Legislature, with the Senate rejecting a number of proposals over the years, there's been a shift, some of those close to the issue feel.

Ayotte has expressed concern about out-of-state trash, and she vowed in her inaugural address that she would not allow a landfill to be built in the North Country near a lake and state park in Dalton – a major reversal from her predecessor, Chris Sununu. Casella Waste Systems, a Vermont-based company that has racked up hundreds of violations at its Bethlehem landfill, has been fighting for that facility for years.

“Our new governor has openly expressed her concerns about these issues, and with this new alignment of interests between this body and the governor, we are in an excellent position to take meaningful action,” Germana said.

Wayne Morrison, president of the North Country Alliance for Balanced Change, a citizen group that has advocated against the landfill and for solid waste reform, said he is “more optimistic now than ever before.”

“We’ve been at this for six years, and this is the most constructive, detailed, meaningful conversation I have heard at any point about the solid waste problems in the state of New Hampshire,” Morrison told lawmakers in the House Environment and Agriculture Committee.

Michael Wimsatt, director of the waste management division of DES, said the agency was not taking a position on the bill. He raised some technical concerns about wording in the bill, which he said the department would work with the committee on.

The legislation faces opposition from the Business & Industry Association, which includes Casella and Waste Management among its members, according to its directory.

In online testimony submissions to the committee, 306 were in favor of the bill, and six were against it.

Morrison urged lawmakers to be bold, courageous, and to “stand up” to industry.

“The moratorium is a perfect opportunity to fix a bunch of things that are broken,” Morrison said. “And I think that’s out-of-state waste, I think that’s leachate ... I think it’s PFAS, and I think it’s around our site-selection process.”