

New Hampshire lawmakers agree on landfill pause, split on duration



A photo taken by the Department of Environmental Services during a June 4 site visit shows the Bethlehem landfill. Screenshot from DES report

Published: 02-18-2025 5:58 PM

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New Hampshire lawmakers are divided over how long to hit pause on new landfill permits.

The Senate is considering a six-year moratorium, while Gov. Kelly Ayotte endorsed just a one-year halt last week. Meanwhile, House lawmakers, who initially pitched a five-year freeze, are now considering scaling their recommendation back to three years.

Despite their differences, most lawmakers agree on one thing: New Hampshire needs time to reassess and strengthen landfill regulations.

“We need to have a break pump because there are a number of issues that have been changing and continue to change as we go along,” said Sen. David Rochefort, the lead sponsor of [Senate Bill 226](#) at a hearing on Tuesday. “We are not going to see trash piling up on the streets if we do this.”

Both [House Bill 171](#) and Senate Bill 226 would put a pause on new landfills, but they wouldn’t stop existing ones from expanding.

Environmental advocates argue that New Hampshire’s landfill siting rules, which were updated last year, aren’t enough to protect the environment and public health. A moratorium, they say, would buy time to improve these rules.

Natch Greyes, vice president of public policy at the Business and Industry Association, opposes the bill. He said there is concern about the economic impact, warning that, if New Hampshire runs short on landfill space, the state will have to send its trash elsewhere.

Currently, nearly half the waste dumped in New Hampshire’s landfills comes from out of state.

“This is eventually going to fall upon all of us and our businesses that generate waste and we don’t see a realistic path at the moment to eliminate the possibility of producing waste,” said Greyes.

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee also heard testimony on [SB 227](#), a bill that would [change how landfills are located near water sources](#). Instead of mandating a fixed distance, the bill would require landfills to be far enough away from water sources based on how long it takes leachate, a toxic liquid mix, to seep through the soil.

The House Environment and Agriculture Committee will vote on its landfill moratorium bill on March 4.