



Legislative Update

March 19, 2023

Introduction

This Legislative Update focuses on how our four Representatives in the House, and our State Senator, have voted recently on the noteworthy bills described below. Our Representatives are Robert Harb, Plaistow (R); Charles Melvin, Newton (R); James Summers, Newton (R); and JD Bernardy, South Hampton (R). Our Senator is Daryl Abbas, Salem (R).

Public School Funding

On February 22, the House passed HB 529 by voice vote. The bill would provide targeted state aid to school districts with low property values and low-income students. HB 529 was sponsored by Democratic Representative Dave Luneau and supported by Republican Representative Rick Ladd, who chairs the House Education Committee. According to the committee report on the bill, “many communities do not have the capacity to raise taxes due to below average equalized property valuation, and often, a high percentage of children who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.” HB 529 is designed to help these communities. The committee voted 20-0 to recommend that the House pass the bill.

Local Vote: The votes of Representatives Harb, Melvin, Summers and Bernardy were not recorded because HB 529 passed by voice vote. HB 529 is a hopeful example of Republicans and Democrats acting on a bipartisan basis to solve a real problem.

School Vouchers

On February 23, the House voted 175-170 to pass HB 430 that was introduced by Democrats to restrict school vouchers (aka “education freedom accounts”) to students who are currently attending a public school (or who are entering kindergarten or first grade). However, HB 430 would not affect students already in the voucher program.

Although the school voucher program was initially estimated to cost \$3.2 million for the two fiscal years ending in 2022 and 2023, the actual cost so far has been about \$25 million. About 75% of the vouchers were provided for students who were already in private school or



homeschooling before the voucher program was enacted. For fiscal years ending in 2024 and 2025, Governor Sununu's budget proposes to spend \$56 million on the voucher program.

Local Vote: Representatives Harb, Melvin, Summers and Bernardy voted to kill HB 430. Currently, Republicans outnumber Democrats 201-198 in the House. However, because more Democrats than Republicans attended the House session during the February 23 snowstorm, the House passed the bill.

Access to Abortion Care

On March 9, the Senate voted 14-10 along party lines to kill SB 181, the Access to Abortion Care Act. It would have created an enforceable statutory right to abortion care in NH during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy.

In 2021, NH enacted a 24-week abortion ban as part of its budget bill. In 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* by ruling that there is no constitutional right to an abortion. With SB 181, Democratic senators were attempting to ensure access to abortion care during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy.

Local Vote: Senator Abbas voted against SB 181.

Parental Rights Bill

On March 16, the Senate voted 14-10 along party lines to pass SB 272, the Parents' Bill of Rights in Education. Before the vote during the floor debate, senators focused on the controversial mandate in the bill that requires teachers or other school personnel, when asked by parents, to disclose whether their child is using a different name, or is being referred to as being a different gender, in order to facilitate a gender transition. Supporters of SB 272 argue it would strengthen family relationships. Opponents argued it would require teachers to "out" the gender identity status of children to their parents when that disclosure should be left to the children when they are ready.

Local Vote: Senator Abbas voted for SB 272.

Want to stay informed?

Visit www.plaistowdemocrats.com