



New Hampshire Senate NEWS RELEASE

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Senate passes bipartisan voting bill

SB 2 extends successful absentee ballot procedures and allows town meetings to be postponed as late as July due to COVID-19 concerns

CONCORD, NH – The Senate voted today to pass SB2 - bipartisan legislation that extends the ability to preprocess absentee ballots and allows for the postponement of annual town meetings until later in 2021 due to concerns regarding COVID-19. The quick approval came on a vote of 24-0.

SB2, sponsored by Sen. James Gray (R-Rochester), would extend the current absentee ballot provisions through July 1, 2021, allowing towns that use the official ballot to process absentee votes several days prior to election day.

Additionally, SB2 would temporarily expand the ability of towns to postpone their Town Meetings until as late as July of this year due to COVID-19 concerns. Current law only allows for local officials to postpone meetings for 72 hours in case of emergency. Towns whose spending authority would expire would expend funds based on the prior year's budget until voters approve a new warrant.

Last year, the Legislature approved HB 1266, giving local election officials greater flexibility in processing absentee ballots to facilitate the Fall 2020 elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. These measures allowed local officials to begin processing the greatly increased absentee ballots ahead of Election Day. Because of these changes, New Hampshire was able to conduct a free, fair, and transparent election while reporting results in a timely manner.

Commenting on the importance of SB 2, Senator Gray said, "While towns were able to conduct voting safely this fall and report results in a timely manner thanks to HB 1266, many local officials have voiced their support for extending absentee ballot procedures and have shared their concerns about their ability to hold deliberative sessions safely. We believe SB2 addresses these issues and gives the Legislature time to consider broader changes to local election procedures."

Senate President Chuck Morse (R-Salem) said, “Cities and towns across New Hampshire need to be able to plan for their upcoming local elections scheduled for March. SB2 provides the clarity and flexibility necessary during the pandemic to ensure the health and safety of voters, election officials and election day volunteers.”

Democratic Leader Sen. Donna Soucy (D-Manchester) added, “In this new legislative session, it is imperative that we continue to work across the aisle to pass proven measures that work for the people of New Hampshire. With today’s vote in favor of SB 2, we put public health first while ensuring fair and equal access to town meetings and special elections by extending the provisions passed in HB 1266. These policies, which encouraged historic voter turnout in November, deserve to be a permanent fixture in our elections and I look forward to our continued efforts to expand voter accessibility.”

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