


# After Ayotte Veto Threat, House Tables Bill Targeting NH Domestic Violence Coalition

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Rep. Ellen Read (D-Newmarket) on the floor of the New Hampshire House.

Even before the House took up Rep. Ellen Read's failed HB 1675, which targets the New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Gov. Kelly Ayotte signaled she wouldn't let it become law.

"Gov. Ayotte does not support this bill and will veto it if it reaches her desk," spokesman John Corbett said in a statement shared with NHJournal.

But Read's revenge bill didn't get that far. When it came up for a vote Wednesday afternoon, Rep. Erica de Vries (D-Hampton) put forward a successful motion to table 1675. Read's bill, even after an amendment, would have slashed state funding for the Coalition and put victims at risk, according to de Vries.

“[T]hese improvements still have failed to address the legitimate concerns of the organizations impacted, concerns about confidentiality that affect safety,” de Vries said. “[T]his bill makes no child and no adults safer.”

Amanda Grady Sexton, director of public affairs for the Coalition, thanked Ayotte and the other lawmakers who stopped Read’s attack.

“We’re relieved that HB 1675 has been tabled and effectively defeated. This bill began as a vendetta driven by conspiracy theories and was originally designed to defund the Coalition, silence victims of crime, and punish the advocates who support them,” Grady Sexton said. “The amendment offered by Rep. [Erica] Layon did nothing to fix the fundamental problem. We are grateful that lawmakers ultimately chose to protect victims’ right to confidential services rather than advance personal disputes fueled by misinformation. We also appreciate that Gov. Kelly Ayotte made clear in advance that she would veto this harmful bill, reinforcing that New Hampshire will not compromise the safety and privacy of victims.”

Ayotte’s veto promise came before the vote, which a source told NHJournal was all but certain to pass. Layon (R-Derry), chair of the House Executive Department and Administration Committee, thought she had secured an agreement to get the bill passed without a roll-call vote during Wednesday’s House session, the source said.

Layon disputed this claim.

“I was skeptical of the bill when it was introduced, but in committee testimony and in further contact, I heard concerns from people cutting the broadest swath of Granite Staters I’ve ever heard from on a non-majority issue,” Layon told NHJournal after the measure was tabled.

“Because I heard how many people had concerns about how the coalition was implementing state law, I drafted an amendment to require DHHS and DOJ to provide operational reporting on the two victims’ funds.

“Statements that I had any sort of agreement with anyone on how to proceed with the bill are patently false, as is the statement from Rep. de Vries that the amendment had any cuts to funding.”

When the bill came up in the House, Layon argued that it was simply good government oversight of an outside agency that receives government funding. However, the Coalition is already subject to extensive state and federal oversight, and has never been cited for any impropriety.

Critics say Read’s HB 1675 targeted the Coalition for an investigation based on the conspiracy theories promulgated by Claire Best. Best is a Hollywood producer who has been harassing the Coalition for several years, making claims that the non-profit Coalition is part

of a wide-ranging CIA conspiracy involving the Catholic Church, the Sununu family, and private businesses engaging in child sex trafficking to exert mind control.

Best began her anti-Coalition crusade after St. Paul School senior Owen Labrie was convicted of sexually assaulting a St. Paul freshman girl. Best, who at one point paid for Labrie's apartment, according to a source, has tried and failed to produce a documentary with progressive podcaster Gracie Gato about the supposed corruption she's uncovered.

Read joined in the effort after the Coalition became one of many groups that did not support her own bill dealing with how rape kits are supplied to sexual assault survivors. Read testified last month that the Coalition's opposition upset her and got her reading Best's work.

Read's rape kit bill would have narrowed the definition of who counts as a sexual assault victim and was opposed by the Coalition, the Department of Justice, and medical professionals.

Layon said she supported Read's bill out of a desire for transparency, and not because she agrees with Best.

"Claire Best had no influence on my opinion of the bill. Testimony of Granite Staters made me recognize that greater transparency was necessary," Layon said.