



National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI New Hampshire

January 16, 2018

Honorable Chairman Carol McGuire
House Executive Departments and Administration
Legislative Office Building – Room 306
36 N. State Street
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Madam Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kenneth Norton and I serve as Executive Director of NAMI NH, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I also have a family member with a serious mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorder who has experienced repeated periods of incarceration. On behalf of NAMI NH, I am here today to speak partially in support of HB 1565.

There is a long and complicated history of New Hampshire's Secure Psychiatric Unit (SPU) with a notable transfer of oversight of the SPU moving from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Corrections several decades ago. I would say at the outset of my testimony that if you have not had a tour of the SPU, I strongly encourage you to do so.

The SPU is tasked with serving the most severely ill people in our state who as a result of their mental illness pose an extreme danger to themselves and/or others. Caring for and treating these people is a very challenging endeavor and the staff who choose to work at the SPU are to be commended for their dedication and compassion toward this population of folks who are highly stigmatized and devalued by society. Despite this devaluing by society at large these people are human beings and are sons and daughters, brothers, sisters as well as mothers, and fathers and are deserving of humane and effective treatment. Representative Cushing is to be commended for his long standing advocacy on behalf of these individuals and their families.

As in other areas of mental health, new and innovative evidenced-based modalities in forensic psychiatry are emerging which result in tremendous improvements and effectiveness of treatments. For instance, our neighbor to the south implemented a change in programing and staffing which has resulted in drastic reductions in the use of restraints and seclusion.

NAMI NH supports the aspirational goal of having the Secure Psychiatric Unit become certified by Joint Commission on Accreditation for Hospitals (JCAH) though not being an expert in JCAH accreditation we are not sure this is even possible given the location and physical constraints of the current location. Toward that end, we suggest that in addition to the report on November 1, 2018 (line 27) that additional report be added for May 1, of 2019 stating progress to date as well as anticipated costs or other issues needing to be addressed to achieve accreditation.

Find Help, Find Hope

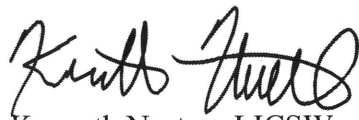
NAMI New Hampshire • 85 North State Street • Concord, NH 03301

InfoLine: 800-242-6264 • Tel. 603-225-5359 • Fax 603-228-8848 • info@naminh.org / www.NAMINH.org

NAMI NH does not support the provision in the legislation to cease civil transfer of patients under RSA 135c if accreditation is not achieved by the January 1, 2020. As without the proper facilities to maintain these individuals elsewhere, stopping these transfers would pose an immediate risk to the individual themselves as well as other patients and staff. We believe that the issue of civil transfer between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Corrections needs to be addressed in the 10 year mental health plan underway by the Department of Health and Human Services and due to the Legislature on June 30, 2018.

Thank you for your consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions which you have.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth Norton", written in a cursive style.

Kenneth Norton, LICSW
Executive Director