

January 16, 2018

Honorable Frank Kotowski
House Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs Committee
Legislative Office Building – Room 205
36 N. State Street
Concord, NH 03301

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

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. On behalf of NAMI NH, I am here to testify in support of HB 1811.

New Hampshire's mental health system currently faces significant challenges. Since going into effect in August of 2014, the New Hampshire Health Protection Program has been an important component to steps NH has been taking to improve the behavioral health service delivery system.

The National Institute on Health (NIH) estimates that one in five people have mental illness. Yet despite the availability of effective treatment, only about 50% of people with mental illness ever seek help. Like other medical illness, delays in treatment mean progression of the seriousness of the illness and more difficulty and cost when the person does seek treatment. Providing over 50,000 Granite State residents with health insurance through the NH Health Protection Program has encouraged early detection and treatment of mental as well as physical disorders such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer where there are high rates of co-occurring depression. Without access to timely mental health treatment through the New Hampshire Health Protection Program, the current crisis we face of people in psychiatric emergencies being boarded in Emergency Departments would undoubtedly be worse than it is now.

The state also faces a serious opioid and substance misuse crisis which is having a profound negative impact on residents of all ages. Addiction disrupts the entire family and puts huge pressure on courts, corrections, child protective services, and other economically and socially costly services. By offering substance misuse and addiction treatment services, the New Hampshire Health Protection Program is the front line in our efforts to stem the current drug crisis. Offering a substance use disorder benefit is especially critical for individuals who have both a mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorder. They have poorer outcomes including increased rates of hospitalization, incarceration, homelessness, complicated medical conditions, suicide and drug overdoses. Providing a treatment benefit for substance use disorders will greatly improve the outcomes for these individuals as well as help reduce medical costs.

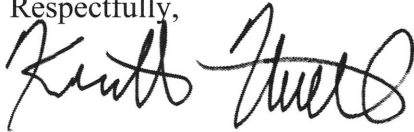
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Lastly, I would add that I serve as a community member on a local hospital medical ethics committee. It is my personal observation from the many cases and scenarios that we have discussed that nothing puts families under duress like serious medical conditions. Continuing to provide health insurance to 50,000 Granite Staters will promote early detection and treatment of all medical conditions and in doing so will help strengthen New Hampshire families.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Respectfully,

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

Kenneth Norton, LICSW
Executive Director