



February 13, 2018

Honorable Chairman Jeb Bradley
Senate Health and Human Service Committee
Legislative Office Building – Room 101
33 N. State Street
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Senator Bradley and Members of the Committee,

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. NAMI NH is also the designated New Hampshire Outreach Partner for New Hampshire for the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). On behalf of NAMI NH I am here to speak in opposition to SB 480.

Electro Convulsive Therapy – ECT is a widely accepted and evidenced-based therapy for severe depression and suicidality. It is not the ECT of days gone by or what you have seen on television and movies. ECT's are typically a last line of defense for treatment of these illnesses, and are only considered when medications and other traditional forms of therapy have failed. Like any other medical intervention, it is not 100% successful for everyone. And also like other treatments there can be troublesome side effects. For a very small subset of people their experience is that it was harmful. However, the clear majority of people who have had ECT's describe them as very helpful and often lifesaving.

Due to the stigma of mental illness, the use of ECT's has tended to have very low visibility to the public. In fact, Concord Hospital has a clinic that provides ECT's several times per week on an outpatient basis. People who receive these treatments are our friends, family members, neighbors and colleagues. I know this first hand, as present and former members of the NAMI NH Board of Directors have received ECT's. They are smart, active people who are engaged with their families and communities and have been excellent Board members.

People who receive ECT's do so only after close consultation with their medical providers about options, side effects and risk. Current practice is the same for minors except that parents are obviously included in the discussion and decision making process.

Regarding people who have been involuntarily committed to a psychiatric facility, this bill confuses involuntary commitment with competency. The vast majority of people who are involuntarily admitted throughout the process are legally competent. They consult with their medical providers and are engaged in determining their treatment options by providing consent to, or objecting to treatment. In the very rare instance when ECT's are considered being

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administered involuntarily, this option is only considered as a last resort life saving measure and done only after a series of legal protections and hearings have been followed.

In conclusion, decisions regarding medical treatment for minors are best left to be determined by themselves and their parents in collaboration with their medical providers. In the extremely rare instances when ECT's are considered against someone's will there are sufficient current legal protections in place. Therefore, NAMI NH asks you to vote this bill as inexpedient to legislate.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth Norton", with a stylized, cursive script.

Kenneth Norton LICSW
Executive Director