



National Alliance on Mental Illness

# nami | New Hampshire

January 14, 2019

Honorable Chairman Mel Myler  
Education Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 207  
107 North Main Street  
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Re: HB131, establish a commission on mental health education programs

Dear Chairman Myler and Committee Members:

My name is Kenneth Norton and I serve as the Executive Director of NAMI NH, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a statewide program here in Concord. I also have a family member with serious mental illness as well as with a co-occurring substance use disorder.

NAMI New Hampshire is here to lend its support to HB131 which seeks to establish a commission on mental health education programs.

Our schools provide students with an education in academic areas, but there are few, if any, formalized curricula for emotional and mental health issues. Now more than ever students need to learn how to manage their emotions and to recognize and address their peers who are showing signs of emotional or mental health distress. Empathy toward students who are having difficulties is critical to that individual as well as to the school community.

I represented NAMI NH on Governor Sununu's School Safety Task Force which issued its formal report in June of 2018. The Task Force spent a great deal of time discussing the importance of social emotional curricula on overall school climate. Toward that end Recommendation # 4 of that report states: *Improve school culture by expanding social and emotional learning programs in schools at all levels statewide.*

More recently, President Trump's Federal Commission on School Safety issued its final report on December 18, 2018 which talks extensively about the importance of mental health, social emotional learning can have on learning and overall school climate. Toward that end one of the specific recommendations is #3. On page 19: *Schools and districts should adopt effective social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies.*

It is NAMI's belief that teaching such socio-emotional skills makes students better able to relate to individuals who are having emotional and/or mental health issues. NAMI believes that such curriculum should start in kindergarten with age appropriate guidance and training and should continue to be part of the school curriculum through graduation from high school.

*Find Help, Find Hope*

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Such a commission can access many available examples of such curriculum from other sources and design it to meet the needs of all NH students. NAMI NH encourages the passage of HB131.

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

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth Norton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K".

Kenneth Norton, LICSW  
Executive Director