



National Alliance on Mental Illness

**nami**

**New Hampshire**

January 22, 2019

Honorable Chairman Lucy Weber  
House Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs  
Legislative Office Building - Room 306  
107 North Main 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. On behalf of NAMI NH, I am here to speak in support of HB 113.

Regarding licensure, I will say at the outset that I am a proud social worker Licensed in NH. I believe strongly in the hundred-year history of the National Association of Social Workers as a professional organization and the important role supervision plays in promoting social work values and our code of ethics which define our profession. I will also say that I rued the day that a separate licensing board was created for Drug and Alcohol counselors. Although I understand why it was created, I believe in many ways it has perpetuated the barrier the barrier that exists to promoting integrated treatment.

Governor Sununu has repeatedly stated that we have both a mental health and addiction crisis in our state. Statistics vary but what is agreed on is that a significant number of people who have a mental illness also have a co-occurring addiction and/or substance misuse. Individuals with co-occurring disorders are at much higher risk of hospitalization, incarceration, homelessness, or or death by suicide or drug overdose.

Yet with rare exceptions we have established separate educational, licensing and treatment systems for them. Back in the day we in the mental health field used to say to the individual with a co-occurring addiction issue... "come back when you have received addiction treatment and we will deal with your mental health issues," and on the addiction side they would say, "come back when your mental illness is treated and we will deal with your addiction...." Sadly, with few exceptions we haven't moved beyond that. One of our NAMI NH Board members said she had sought out an addiction specialist last week to help her and was told that because she had an underlying diagnosis of schizophrenia they were not able to provide her treatment.

State licensing of mental health professionals was begun as a way to protect consumers. It quickly evolved into a mechanism for insurance companies to control or deny payment. It has now morphed into a process where professionals have pulled the ladder up behind them and

*Find Help, Find Hope*

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made it increasingly difficult for new applicants and those licensed in other states to get reciprocity and licensed in New Hampshire. The professional guilds are often seeking to protect their own self-interests and turf rather than looking at the needs of individuals who are coming to them for help.

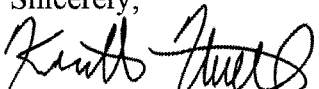
While there are some people who look for specific credentials when seeking out treatment, other than whether their insurance will cover the cost, most people don't really care about the LMNOP after someone's name. What they want to know is that the person has met a minimal level of training and supervision. I believe what is proposed in this bill is reasonable and will insure that individuals have the proper training and supervision to be licensed. If we had more people with skills sets who were licensed that had a background in addiction treatment, that would better serve individuals in NH.

This bill will undoubtedly create some administrative challenges for the separate Boards of Mental Health Practice and Drug and Alcohol Counselors to work out, but the numbers of people this will affect will be very small and they should be able to collaborate to move this forward

From the state's perspective, the primary interest right now should be in increasing the availability of qualified licensed professionals regardless of their professional affiliation. As a social worker, there are other professionals' credentials I can seek through the National Association of Social Workers that define my expertise as a *social worker* should I choose to do so.

NAMI NH respectfully requests that you consider these proposed changes and vote HB 113 as ought to pass.

Sincerely,

  
Kenneth Norton, LICSW  
Executive Director