



April 30, 2019

Honorable Patrick Long
House Children and Family Law Committee
Legislative Office Building – Room 206
33 N. State Street
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Chairman Long 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 family members with serious mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorder. On behalf of NAMI NH, I am asking you to vote in support of SB 131.

During the past several years NAMI NH has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of grandparents or other family members tasked with being the primary caregiver of a child. Many of these children have been identified as having severe early childhood trauma or other serious emotional disturbance. These grandparents and caregivers are attending our support groups, educational programs, and calling our information and resource line for assistance.

Most of these people never expected to find themselves in a primary parenting role at this point in their lives. They are often unprepared financially, socially, emotionally and physically for the demands of this task. They often feel isolated and/or uncomfortable when attending school or other events and seeing that they have decades on the other parents. And they are often faced with a myriad of complex issues unique to their situation including how to obtain health insurance, navigating termination of parental rights or guardianship hearings, how to feed a teen with an endless appetite on a social security check that barely covers their basic living expenses, and how to care for a child who has been traumatized by the change in primary parenting roles caused by mental illness and or drug addiction.

We must do more to help these grand families. Establishing a commission to better understand their needs and the challenges they face is a good starting point. I urge you to vote SB 131 as ought to pass. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,


Kenneth Norton, LICSW
Executive Director

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