

January 29, 2020

Chairman Mel Myler
House Education Committee
33 N. State Street – LOB Room 207
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Chairman Myler and Committee Members,

My name is JB Brackett and I am testifying today on behalf of NAMI NH, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, as the Public Policy Assistant. On behalf of NAMI NH I am testifying in support of House Bill 1163, requiring schools to update documents and software to include the option of identifying a student as non-binary.

Some may consider the radical changes in the gender spectrum over the last decade to be a “fad.” In reality, however, the reason we see more and more young (and old) people coming forward to reveal their true gender is because it is becoming more widely accepted and understood. A variance in gender identity is generally respected among young people these days, leading more to feel comfortable disclosing their gender if it does not match their gender assigned at birth. I feel it is important for the health and well-being of students, that the place young people spend the majority of their time take steps to affirm their gender preference.

The greater numbers of people disclosing their true gender identities does not change the many challenges young transgender and nonbinary people go through. Many transgender and nonbinary youth are rejected by loved ones, including immediate families, or are bullied at school. Due to the alarming increase in violence against transgender and gender nonconforming individuals in recent years, many of these youth feel unsafe.

Because of this, it is no surprise that those in the transgender and gender nonconforming communities are at greater risk of suicidal thoughts and actions. In fact, research indicates transgender people are twice as likely to think about or attempt suicide than individuals who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth or LGB folks.

A 2018 study by the American Academy of Pediatrics reflects the increased risk level in transgender and non-binary youth. This study found the highest rates of attempted suicide were by transgender men and nonbinary youth, at 50.8% and 41.8% respectively.

While these statistics are disturbing, it is important to note there are very simple things that can be done to reduce these high percentages and improve overall health and well-being of this group. One very simple thing that can be done is the passing of House Bill 1163.

Find Help, Find Hope

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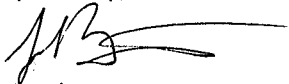
A study performed by researchers at the University of Texas at Austin found that when transgender and gender nonconforming youth are able to use their chosen name — the name they choose themselves to reflect their true gender — their risk of mental health conditions and suicide decreases. In fact, this study found that youth who are able to use their chosen name experience 71% fewer symptoms of severe depression, a 34% decrease in suicidal ideation, and a 65% decrease in suicide attempts.

If the simple act of allowing a person to use their chosen name can reflect such drastic improvements in mental health, then we can assume the same for a person's ability to disclose their gender identity on official documents. As of January 1, 2020, NH now allows for driver's licenses and official identification cards in our state to include a non-binary designation. NAMI NH believes that schools should follow suite and include the option for students to be identified as nonbinary and in doing so allow youth to be identified as what they truly are.

To a transgender or gender nonconforming person, the reflection of their gender on official documents — such as state IDs, work documents, or health records can play a significant role in their self-esteem and their emotional well-being and mental health. NAMI NH believes passage of HB 1163 is a simple yet effective step toward reducing suicidal thoughts and behaviors. We ask you to vote this bill as ought to pass.

Thank you for your time and your consideration on this incredibly important matter.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JB Brackett', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JB Brackett
NAMI NH Public Policy Assistant