



# NAMI | New Hampshire

January 23, 2020

Honorable Representative Rene Cushing  
House Criminal Justice Committee  
33 North State Street - Room 204  
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Dear Chairman Cushing and Committee Members:

My name is Kenneth Norton and I am the Executive Director of NAMI NH, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I have worked extensively in the field of suicide prevention as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in NH, as well as in suicide prevention public health efforts in NH and nationally. I have served as a subject matter expert on mental health and suicide prevention for the Department of Defense, Defense Center on Excellence and the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration.

By way of background, NAMI NH provides 16 hours of training for all law enforcement officers during their training at the police academy. We are also providing Mental Health First Aid training and Crisis Intervention training to law enforcement and first responders through a federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Mental Health Awareness Training Grant. Much of the training we do involves talking with law enforcement and first responders about the higher rates of depression, suicide, Post Traumatic Stress and suicide in their professions. I have also served on the current and past commissions addressing trauma and law enforcement and first responders.

NAMI NH is strongly supportive of efforts to provide screening for all law enforcement officers for psychological stability and substance use disorders prior to becoming certified. However, we would like to see clear guidelines for how decisions are made based on the results of this screening regarding an individual's mental fitness for duty. Individuals who have received past treatment or potentially are in current treatment for a mental health condition should not be automatically ruled as unfit to serve. Some of those individuals may make excellent law enforcement officers depending on their diagnosis, severity of symptoms, responsiveness to treatment etc. They may be especially valuable in assisting members of the public who have mental health conditions or are experiencing suicide thoughts and in providing support and encouraging other officers who are struggling to seek treatment. In conclusion, it is the opinion of NAMI NH that it is critical for there to be clear guidelines for how screening results of prospective law enforcement candidates is interpreted relative to fitness for duty.

I am happy to answer any questions which you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth Norton", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Kenneth Norton, LICSW  
Executive Director

*Find Help, Find Hope*

NAMI New Hampshire • 85 North State Street • Concord, NH 03301  
InfoLine: 800-242-6264 • Tel: 603-225-5359 • [info@NAMINH.org](mailto:info@NAMINH.org) • [www.NAMINH.org](http://www.NAMINH.org)