



January 16, 2019

Honorable Chairman Lucy Weber
House Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs Room 205
36 North State Street – Room 205
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Madam Chair and Committee Members:

My name is Ken Norton and I serve as the Executive Director of NAMI NH, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I also have a family member with a serious mental illness and a co-occurring substance use disorder who has experienced repeated periods of incarceration.

On behalf of NAMI NH I am here today to offer testimony regarding House Bill 240 establishing a commission to study the causes of high suicide rates of emergency and first responders.

By way of background, I led the development of NAMI NH's Connect Suicide Prevention Training which was designated as a national best practice program in suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention and which has provided training in over 40 states, 5 countries and 40 tribal nations. I have also provided trainings and briefings to the Department of Defense, the Veterans Administration, the Defense Center on Excellence and Psychological Health and serve on the Steering Committee for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

NAMI NH's Connect Program has worked extensively with Law Enforcement and First Responders about how to respond to individuals who are suicidal and/or in a mental health crisis; and as well as their own mental health and the higher rates of PTSD, depression and suicide among mental health professionals. We are grateful to the sponsors for bringing this bill forward to address what is truly a life or death issue. While there have been several recent national reports regarding increasing suicide rates in New Hampshire and nationally, there is little attention brought to the increased risk to first responders. While data for Emergency Medical Services and Fire Safety is not as readily available, we do know there have been four suicide deaths of Law Enforcement in New Hampshire in approximately the past 24 months.

While we are strongly in support of the need and concept for this commission, we recommend combining it with LSR 2019-0500 sponsored by Senator Birdsell which seeks to continue the commission established under SB 553 to study the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder in first responders. This Committee had excellent representation and participation by first responders. I represented NAMI NH on this Commission and will say it was one of the better

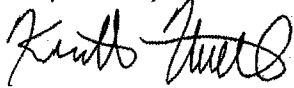
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organized commissions I have served on and resulted in proposed legislation to add Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Acute Stress Disorder to the to the definition of "injury" for purposes of worker's compensation claims.

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, prominent initial "K".

Kenneth Norton, LICSW
Executive Director