



National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI | New Hampshire

February 11, 2020

Honorable Chairman Thomas Sherman
Senate Health and Human Services Committee - Room 103
33 North State Street
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Dear Chairman Sherman 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 have family members who have mental illness as well substance misuse disorders. On behalf of NAMI NH, I am here today to speak in support of HB 490.

I will say at the outset, that NAMI NH is not very knowledgeable or an expert on the issue of tick-borne diseases. We are acutely aware that despite the great advances that have been made in medicine, there is still a lot of unknowns about the brain generally and about mental illness specifically. Scientists have long theorized there are connections between infection and mental illness, yet not a lot of research has been done in this area. Of note is the relatively recent understanding of Psychiatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections (PANDAS) which directly links the virus from strep throat with a wide array of severe symptoms associated with mental illness. The New Hampshire Legislature recognized the importance of supporting aggressive treatment of PANDAS and passed legislation in 2019 to require insurance companies to reimburse for this treatment.

NAMI NH has heard anecdotal stories from our members regarding their loved ones having severe symptoms of mental illness and then being diagnosed with a major mental illness, only to have the psychiatric symptoms completely remit following a later diagnosis of Lyme Disease and aggressive treatment. For individuals with chronic and serious medical conditions such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes, there is a high co-occurrence of depression and we presume this is also true for individuals with Lyme. We are also concerned that like many people with mental illness, individuals reporting symptoms of Lyme and other tick-borne disease have been unable to access medical professionals knowledgeable about these diseases and have difficulty obtaining an accurate diagnosis or treatment regime. Like mental illness, many of these people end up feeling devalued and marginalized.

On a personal note I have a loved one who had serious and increasingly debilitating symptoms of Lyme disease and went through several false negative tests before finally being diagnosed with chronic Lyme disease. After a series of ineffective treatment prescribed by their primary

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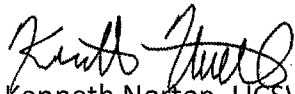
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care provider, by word of mouth from others they eventually made their way to THE Lyme doctor in Concord who successfully treated with mega doses of antibiotics. I have spoken with many other friends and acquaintances in central New Hampshire who have had similar experiences and end up at the same doctor who I recently heard has a six-month waiting list to be seen.

Based on the increased incidence of tick-borne illness in New Hampshire and the difficulty for individuals to access timely and effective treatment, NAMI NH supports HB 490 and requests you to vote it as ought to pass.

I am happy to answer any questions which you have.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth Norton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kenneth" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Norton".

Kenneth Norton, LICSW
Executive Director