



January 29, 2020

Honorable Senator Sharon Carson
Senate Executive Departments and Administration
Legislative Office Building — Room 101
33 North State Street
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 have family members who have mental illness as well substance misuse disorders who have been involved in the criminal justice system as a result of their mental health conditions. On behalf of NAMI NH, I am here today to speak in support of SB 412 regarding corrections officers.

NAMI NH would like to raise two other areas of consideration for this proposed commission. The first is a review and recommendation of training needs of corrections officers. With over 65% of the prison population in NH estimated to have a mental health condition, an area for the commission to review is training needs of corrections officers and specifically whether more training is needed relative to understanding, communicating with, identifying potential suicide risk and assisting inmates with mental health conditions.

The second is a related area relative to the mental health needs of corrections officers themselves. They are subject to considerable stress and occasional traumatic incidents which can be compounded by mandatory overtime and staff shortages. Law enforcement and first responders have begun to establish their own internal peer support programs utilizing trained peers to provide support as well as to provide debriefing after critical incidents. Examining whether a similar program might improve job satisfaction, performance and retention may also be a worthwhile endeavor for this commission.

Thank you for your time and your consideration. On behalf of NAMI NH we ask you to vote SB 412 as ought to pass.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth Norton".

Kenneth Norton, LICSW
Executive Director