



National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI | New Hampshire

January 13, 2020

Honorable Chairman Tom Sherman
Senate Health and Human Services Committee - Room 101
36 North State Street
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Dear Chairman Sherman:

My name is Ken Norton and I serve as the Executive Director of NAMI NH, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I am an adoptive parent and a former licensed foster parent. I also 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 506.

As you are aware, since 2012 New Hampshire has been in the midst of a mental health crisis due to the lack of availability of inpatient psychiatric beds. This has resulted in individuals who have a mental health crisis being "boarded" often against their will, in emergency departments for days and weeks while waiting for a vacancy for an inpatient bed. There have been several high-profile incidents of assaults which have occurred involving individuals being boarded. There are an unknown number of less high-profile assault incidents involving individuals being boarded in emergency rooms. Some of these incidents have resulted in immediate transfer to a county jail facility. Others have resulted in criminal charges being pressed.

Certainly, there are other instances of workplace violence that may also be related to mental illness but not involving emergency department boarding.

Presuming that many of the situations involving workplace safety in health care settings do involve individuals who may have a mental health condition, NAMI NH is asking for consideration for amending this bill to include a representative from NAMI NH, or someone else with a mental health background to serve on the commission.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth Norton, LICSW
Executive Director

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